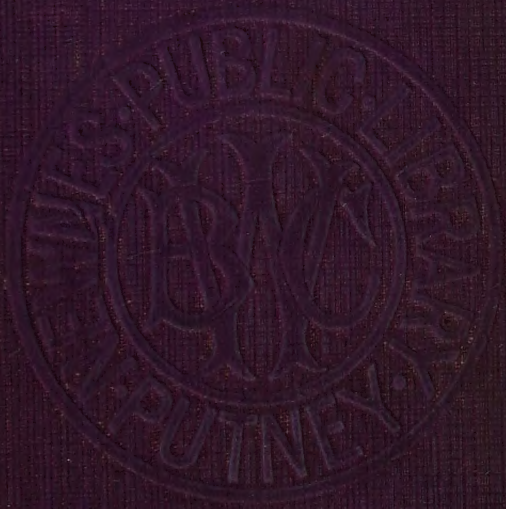
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THE FORAGING PARTY ATTACKING A SEA ELEPHANT

*Drawing from Greig's Journal* *Frontispiece*

# BLENDEN HALL

THE TRUE STORY
OF
A SHIPWRECK
A CASTING AWAY
AND
LIFE ON A DESERT ISLAND

By

J. G. LOCKHART

PUTNEY.

CLASS No. 910.4
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PUTNEY.

# INTRODUCTION

I HAVE called this book *Blenden Hall*. I might have christened it more aptly 'A Passage to India,' had not the title been already claimed by a less obscure writer for a more notable though fictitious tale. For this is the story of a passage to India—one of the strangest and longest and most parlous ever made. How many novelists have taken a small community of incongruous persons and flung them by a trick of fortune into some remote and inaccessible spot—John Buchan in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, Rose Macaulay in *Orphan Island*, Owen Rutter in *Lucky Star*, to name three modern examples out of many ; have delighted to show the human response to so strange a conjunction, the discovery of an Admirable Crichton, the rise of him, the fall of her, the love-making and the quarrels, the revolution in values, and in the end, of course, the return of the community, changed and chastened, or unchanged and unchastened, to the world we know ! That has all been fiction, but here is the thing in history, as it really happened, once on a time, to a little party of English men and women—chosen, as it were, by the mere hazard of a booked passage—in the year 1821.

Here, then, is the interest of the story, such as

it is, the interest and the fascination which must always cling round any tale of a desert island. Quite lately Mr. Walter de la Mare has written a book on this very subject. He concerns himself chiefly with Alexander Selkirk, who was or was not (for there is a difference of opinion on the point) the original of Robinson Crusoe. I respectfully deplore the gaps in Mr. de la Mare's notes. That he should have omitted all mention of the *Blenden Hall* is not surprising, for probably, like most people, he has never met the story. But what of those other omissions? Of Philip Ashton, for instance, who lived for the better part of a year on Roatan, a pleasant enough spot where wild fruit and cocoanuts and the eggs of turtles abounded, and pigs ranged the woods; where, notwithstanding, he never ceased to bewail his fate. Then there was Robert Jeffery, of the Royal Navy, who was caught stealing the midshipmen's beer and marooned on the rock of Sombrero, off the Leeward Islands. A very poor job Jeffery made of his marooning, though it is true that his whole equipment consisted of a clasp knife and a pocket handkerchief, and that his island held nothing more edible than seagulls and black lizards. He spent most of his time weeping, and was nearly dead when he was taken off by an American schooner. I was glad, on the other hand, that Mr. de la Mare had included the delightful story of Peter Ferrano, wrecked on a

sandy island off the coast of Peru, where he remained, if we are to believe him, for seven long years, dining on turtle and shellfish. After three years another man was washed ashore off another wreck, and when the pair of them met, each was convinced that the other must be the Devil. So they retired to a safe distance and recited the Apostles' Creed at each other. I am sorry to say that later on they quarrelled and ceased to be on speaking terms, and for some months cut each other in the most approved fashion when they met.

Personally I have known only one man who has been cast away on a desert island. He was a midshipman in H.M.S. *Megaera*, which in 1871 sprang a leak and was driven by storm on to St. Paul's Island, in the South Indian Ocean. St. Paul's is a mere volcanic rock, with no amenities or excitements. I cannot remember how my friend and his 300 comrades lived during the eighty-one days they spent there. They must have got stores out of the wreck, and they certainly found penguins' eggs, for my friend used to tell how they cooked them in a minute or two simply by putting them in the sand. They were excessively bored and not at all sorry when at last they were taken off. They had no casualties until they reached Australia, where one or two of them died through the excessive hospitality of the inhabitants.

The truth is that life on a desert island is a vastly over-rated business. It is much better in fiction than in fact. It must brighten things up, for instance, if Captain Kidd has buried his treasure (perhaps I should say one of his numerous treasures) on your island, or if there is the chance of an occasional visit from cannibals, or Spaniards, or pirates. Again, it would not be so bad if you could choose your island beforehand—and the less desert the better ; best of all if it were such a cornucopia as that of the Swiss Family Robinson, in which every sort of useful plant and every kind of beast, wild and domestic, miraculously flourished. You think you would be good and happy in such an Eden ? Perhaps you would. But how would you fare in an island not of fancy but of fact ? You would have little time or inclination even for the improving soliloquies of Robinson Crusoe ; for such hours as you might spare from the hard business of finding food, you would certainly spend in devising means of escape. You would get very tired of a menu of penguin and wild celery. If you had companions you would soon loathe the sight of them ; if you had none you would be oppressed with loneliness. You would be deliriously excited on that happy day when your deliverer's smoke appeared on the horizon ; and, if your sojourn had been sufficiently long, when you were taken aboard you would find, like Alexander Selkirk, that you

had almost forgotten how to talk English, that your digestion, like Robert Jeffery's, would rebel against civilised food and your feet against civilised boots. But you would not, I think, ask to be put back again. You disagree? Very well, then I must beg you to read carefully the story of the *Blenden Hall*.

I confess that when I first encountered it I had my suspicions. It seemed too good to be true. These people had stepped straight out of a novel —of some imitator of Thackeray's perhaps, for here and there we find a suggestion of *The Newcomes*; in Mrs. Lock, with her past and her tongue; in little Painter, whose wife, so precipitately acquired, was so much the better half; in Dr. Law, who was valiant on whisky and prudent on water; in Quartermaster Hormby, who behaved so terribly, terribly badly; in Peggy, who chose in the end the simple life rather than the fleshpots of civilisation; and finally in no less significant a person than Master Stephen Newcome, a cadet 'of the Company's Marine.'

Yet, when I came to look into the matter, I found very quickly that the story was true and that the people were real, and that there was a ship *Blenden Hall*, which sailed from Gravesend on Sunday, May 6th, 1821, and was cast away on Inaccessible Island on July 23rd.

Even so, without Alexander Greig and his little book, we should have had no more than the bare

bones of the story—a voyage, a shipwreck, and in fullness of time a rescue. It would be a tale remarkable enough to claim a chapter in a book of escapes at sea, but not so uncommon as to merit a volume of its own. For five years I hunted Greig and his diary without success, finding him at last by no merit of my own, but through the good services of Mr. Charles Lauriat of Boston. He it was who finally procured and sent me a copy of Greig's book. From a label on the front of the binding and a stamp on the title-page I gather that it was run to ground in no more likely a spot than the library of the Young Women's Christian Association at Brooklyn, New York. Its full title is

Fate
of
THE BLENDEN HALL
*East Indiaman*,
CAPTAIN ALEXANDER GREIG,
Bound to Bombay:
with
AN ACCOUNT OF HER WRECK
AND THE SUFFERINGS AND PRIVATIONS ENDURED BY
THE SURVIVORS, FOR SIX MONTHS, ON
THE DESOLATE ISLANDS OF
INACCESSIBLE AND TRISTAN D'ACUNHA[1]
in Lat. 37° 29″ South. Long. 11° 45″ West.
By ALEXANDER M. GREIG,
One of the passengers,
From a Journal kept on the Islands, and written
with the Blood of the Penguin.

[1] The island is so spelt throughout. I have, however, followed the more usual spelling of Tristan da Cunha.

The book was published by William H. Colyer of New York in the year 1847, a quarter of a century after the events of which it tells. It could not have been published sooner, and even in 1847 could not be published in this country, for reasons, I suspect, connected with the law of libel. Let Greig himself explain :

> ' It was extremely difficult for me to decide, for a long time, whether I should introduce the real names of our passengers. This dilemma has been one of the principal reasons why I have not sooner acceded to the wishes of my friends by an earlier publication. The greater part of my fellow-sufferers are gone to their long home, and I should deeply deplore the infliction of any injury to the feelings of those they have left behind, by reciting incidents, in connection with their names, which might reflect upon their characters ; while justice compels me to speak of each as I found him under the most trying position in which he could be placed ; and I leave the reader to make that allowance for those imperfections of human nature which are too frequently exhibited by less disastrous events than those I witnessed. With a determination to adhere strictly to the facts, a promise which I was desirous of making to the reader, I felt the difficulty of my situation increased, as under the circumstances using assumed names would, in a measure, be a deviation from such a pledge.

'Upon reflection, however, aided by the advice of friends, I have determined to announce the reasons why, in this instance, I am induced to portray the character of the different parties under other names, retaining their rank and position in society precisely as they stood.

'As this book will, in all probability, find its way into the hands of those of our passengers who still survive, and who, notwithstanding the disguise of a cognomen, will have no difficulty in recognising their own characters, I have only to assure them, which I do with the utmost candour, that I will

Nothing extenuate, or aught set down in malice.

They must be fully aware that a number of unfounded reports and exaggerated statements have, from time to time, been circulated respecting them, casting unmerited reflections upon the conduct of some, and attributing virtues to others to which they had no claim. I trust they will also do me the justice to believe that I am influenced by no personal animosity; for many I shall ever entertain the highest respect and esteem, and sincerely regret, in laying before the reader a faithful narrative of the sufferings we endured together, that I am compelled to censure the conduct of anyone.'

I know practically nothing of Greig himself, save the little he tells us. He was the son of Captain Greig, who owned and commanded the

*Blenden Hall* ; and apparently between 1821 and 1847 he emigrated to and found employment in the United States, as on the reverse of the title-page he is described as ' in the Clerk's Office of the Southern District of New York.' When he sailed east in the *Blenden Hall* he was a youth of seventeen ; and we may add from internal evidence that he had a sense of humour, an eye for the foibles of his neighbours, no great respect for his elders, and a touch of the malice which he is so careful to disclaim.

Writing about his fellow-passengers with a candour which I find wholly admirable, we have seen that, as late even as 1847, he judged it prudent to re-christen them with names of his own invention. The disguise is flimsy enough. In most cases we might penetrate it without much difficulty. But why should we try ? The people themselves only matter for the part they play in the story. They are dead. Let them rest in peace. And let us, with one or two necessary exceptions, use Alexander's pseudonyms throughout.

I must expect, of course, to be asked for proof that the story he tells is genuine. Though I cannot vouch for every detail, I am convinced of its general veracity ; and wherever it has been possible to test the author he has emerged creditably from the ordeal. I have discovered in the files of the old East India Company, now stored at the

India Office, some correspondence dealing with the *Blenden Hall* ; and this, by the courtesy of the librarian, I have been permitted to copy and reproduce in an appendix. Apart from its value as evidence, it is an interesting example of its kind. Further, there is an anonymous article in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*,[1] and there is another article in the *Asiatic Journal* of 1822,[2] by ' Lieutenant John Pepper, Honourable East India Company's Bombay Marine,' whom we shall meet presently under the code name of ' Painter.' In these sources I have found much to confirm and nothing to confute our friend. The correspondence is official and strictly relevant to its subject —the claims of certain of the Company's officers, who had lost most of their possessions in the shipwreck, to compensation ; and if the two articles are necessarily much more discreet than Greig's diary makes any pretension to be, they endorse him on many points and may therefore be taken as sound evidence for the defence.

Then it may be asked, Why not print his book as it stands, his *ipsissima verba*, without deletion or addition or comment ? For these reasons. Even Alexander has his dull patches. I have already quoted a full page which might have been compressed into a few lines. When events march, and there are quarrels, shipwreck, mutiny

[1] Vol. V., p. 252.
[2] Vol. XIV., p. 119. Greig gives a wrong reference for each of these articles.

and so forth, he marches with them vigorously enough ; but he wrote in a day when you were expected to moralise in misfortune, and moralise again when you had escaped from it, and describe your plight and your surroundings in language that sounds prosy and sententious to the twentieth-century ear. Alexander does this less than others in his circumstances have done, but he does it. It was an age when the amateur in letters often modelled his style on that of Dr. Johnson. Nowadays even the founder of that school of writing is not easy to read, and the 'Johnsonese' of his imitators is less easy. It is a style that might suit a dictionary, but is not the most convenient for a narrative of shipwreck and adventure ; and Alexander, whenever he becomes self-conscious, drops into it. But there are other reasons why I have told his story in my own way. There are numerous gaps in it. For instance, although he tells us something of his home he does not give its exact locality, which, however, I discovered without much difficulty ; and although he was making his first voyage in the *Blenden Hall*, he tells us next to nothing about the ship. I have therefore supplemented his facts from other sources, when supplement was possible and necessary. His dates, again, are most carelessly given ; they are often obviously and absurdly wrong. And he has no sense of construction. He describes happenings out of their

due sequence, breaks off to tell us something else, goes back to his original theme, repeats himself, alludes casually to people and occurrences not previously mentioned. In short, he commits almost every offence which, in a story of this sort, will weary and bewilder the reader.

So I hope my assurance will be accepted that I have taken out nothing that should have stayed in, that when he tells his tale well I have left him to tell it almost without interference, and when not so well, as in the latter part of the book, I have made bold to step in and interrupt.

I must end this Introduction by recording my gratitude to Mr. Charles Lauriat for the loan of Greig's book, to the proprietors of the Parker Gallery for allowing me, with their unvarying courtesy, to reproduce two of the prints from their magnificent collection, to Messrs. Geo. Allen & Unwin for the view of Inaccessible Island, which appeared in *The Lonely Island*, by R. A. Rogers, and to Mrs. K. M. Barrow and Messrs. Skeffington for allowing me to reproduce three illustrations from the former's book, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha*.

CHAPTER I

# GRAVESEND

About three miles west of Dartford lies the little town of Bexley, which, a hundred years ago, was no more than a village; and nearly a mile to the north of it is Blenden Hall.[1] Like so many old houses, the Hall gives the impression of having grown up rather than of having been built, each century adding something to it, haphazard and after the fashion of its day, and yet, by an instinctive good taste or through the kindly assimilation of the English countryside, without marring the whole. So, while parts of the house may be traced to the middle years of the seventeenth century, or even earlier, and parts perhaps to the reign of Queen Anne, the fine front is indisputably Georgian. Although to-day the surrounding lanes have become motor roads, and building schemes have spawned new villas almost at its gates, the place itself remains unspoilt, at the edge of a little lake in a park of splendid trees.

At an early hour on a fine May morning in 1821, a travelling-carriage rumbled slowly down

[1] To-day it is spelt Blendon Hall.

the long avenue that led to Blenden Hall.[1] At the entrance to the house a boy of seventeen was waiting among strapped valises.[2] With him were his father, also dressed for a journey, and his mother, to whom he had now to bid good-bye. It was a painful parting for mother and son. Young Greig was about to leave for India, having obtained a commission in the army of the Honourable East India Company. In those days such a separation was the business almost of a lifetime. You went to India, and there very often you stayed, until at the end of years, with a handsome fortune and an impaired liver, you returned to enjoy a peaceful old age at home. By comparison with to-day there was no coming and going when the trooping season began, no six months' leave every two years or so, no mail

[1] The existing avenue is quite short, and emerges on to the road from Bexley to Eltham, but there are traces of an earlier and longer avenue, running north-east to the hamlet of Blendon. This may have been the 'long avenue' described by Alexander.

[2] Although Alexander never mentions his home by name, we are justified in finding it in Blenden Hall. His description of the house itself and of the journey to Dartford supports this view, and it is confirmed by the fact that his father's ship was named *Blenden Hall*. There is no trace, however, of the family of Greig in the Parish Registers of Bexley, and they were certainly never the owners of Blenden Hall. It was an estate which passed through many hands. In 1644 the Wroths held it; they were succeeded in 1673 by the Bretts, and later by a General James Pattison. His nephew sold it in 1809 to a Mr. John Smith, who appears to have been the owner in 1821. We may guess that the Greigs were relatives of Mr. Smith; possibly Mrs. Greig was his daughter, but against this Alexander speaks of the house as 'my father's residence'; or possibly the Greigs were Mr. Smith's tenants for a term of years. The point is only worth mentioning because everyone likes a starting-place for a story.

bringing you news that was only three weeks old. So we may picture to ourselves that Mrs. Greig parted from her son in the knowledge that in this life she was unlikely ever to see him again. For a moment they clung to each other, but the horses were stamping, and the Captain, though kindly, was becoming impatient, thinking, doubtless, of the breakfast he was to eat at Dartford and of a certain tall ship waiting for him off Gravesend. So at length Alexander tore himself free almost by force and flung himself sobbing into the carriage. The door slammed, the whip cracked, and they were off, pounding clumsily down the avenue and through the village, to take the Dartford road ; each dear, familiar landmark swimming past Alexander's eyes as he gulped down his sobs and strained forward to take a last long view of his home.

The journey had come all of a hurry. It had been arranged that Alexander should sail in his father's own ship, the *Blenden Hall*, chartered for the voyage by the East India Company and due to leave at the end of June or thereabouts. Alexander went north to pay farewell visits in Scotland—one in particular to his old grandfather at Arbroath ; while the Captain himself took his wife and the rest of his family to his house at Brighton. Suddenly fresh orders arrived from

the Company. The *Blenden Hall* was to sail with as little delay as possible. She was lying at Gravesend, and luckily her loading was well forward. When this news came, Alexander was only two days back from Scotland, and while his father and mother hurried back to Blenden to join him, he plunged feverishly into his last preparations, completing his kit, packing his trunks, his clothes, his books, his fowling-pieces, crowding into a few days the work of weeks, and leaving himself no time even to take leave of his brothers and sisters at Brighton. As for his father the Captain, who was to command his own ship, he might and did grumble at the change of the sailing-date, but there was no arguing with the orders of the Honourable Directors.

For a space Alexander sat in silence beside his father. He describes his sensations, which were those we might expect from a boy of seventeen just parted from a fond parent and a happy home. He describes, too, how quickly his reflections took a more cheerful form ; how he began to muse upon the adventure of the voyage that lay in front of him, on the novelty of life in India, and even on the prospect of his return home, many years on, full of honour and perhaps of substance.

The carriage had not rumbled very far,

however, when Alexander had a foretaste of adventures to come and a rough awakening from his pleasant dreams. After leaving Bexley the Dartford road ran east across Bexley Heath. To-day the Heath is a golf course ; a hundred years ago it was still a haunt of footpads and petty highwaymen—in Alexander's words, 'one of the most notorious places in all England for such adventures.'

'We had not proceeded above one-third of the way across Bexley Heath,' he wrote, 'when suddenly I was startled from my reverie by my father's exclamation, "Open the pistol-case, my boy, and throw that bag under the seat!" He gave me at the same time a small bag of gold with one hand, while with the other he let down the fore-glass and, putting his body half out of the window, called to the postilion to drive as fast as he could.'

It was five o'clock in the morning, and though in full daylight, the Heath was almost deserted ; almost, but not quite, for when Alexander, having quickly got out the pistols, himself took a look out of the window, he saw two horsemen spurring across the Heath towards the carriage. They were, beyond doubt, highwaymen. A stern chase began. The postilion had whipped his horses into a gallop, the heavy carriage

rocking and plunging in its headlong career. But the strangers came up fast. Presently they were within hailing distance, and called loudly to the postilion to pull up. The Captain shouted to him to drive on and told Alexander to cover with his pistol the horseman on the left, while he tackled the man on the right; "for," he added, "we will give them a warm reception at any rate."

'I was about to follow this advice when I fancied that the men allowed us to gain ground and were out of pistol shot, as I could distinctly see them curbing in their horses, while consulting together, in all probability, upon the prudence of relinquishing the pursuit. It was fortunate for them that they did so, for most assuredly one would have received the contents of my Joe Manton,[1] as I was resolved not to fire till he came so close upon the carriage that I could make sure of my man; and the other would have stood but a poor chance with my father, who was an excellent shot.'

The highwaymen may have been taken aback by the resolute bearing of the Greigs; they were further discouraged by the appearance of a man mounted on a pony who was trotting towards

[1] A make of pistol.

them. They had evidently no stomach for a fight with the odds against them, for they now reined in their horses, turned and galloped back the way they had come. By the time the coach had drawn alongside the man on the pony these faint-hearted ruffians were almost out of sight. The new arrival was as peaceful a traveller as the Greigs. He explained to them that his wife had been taken ill in the night and that he was off to fetch a doctor. When they told him of their late encounter he whipped a brace of pistols out of his holster and jogged his spurs into his pony, 'nowise intimidated at the odds he was likely to encounter.'

The Greigs continued their journey at a gentler pace to Dartford, which they reached without further misadventure. Scarcely had they alighted at the inn where they were to breakfast and change horses than two patrols rode up, to whom the Greigs at once reported their meeting on the Heath.

> 'They requested us to describe the men with more precision, which I was enabled to do, having watched them during the pursuit through the glass at the back of the carriage. Upon my statement that one had on what appeared to me to be a red waistcoat with white stripes, buttoned up to the throat, the senior

officer instantly exclaimed, "Jem Turner, by the Lord Harry!" "Aye, as sure as fate!" said the other, and after enquiring which road the men took, away scampered these two worthies as fast as their horses could lay feet to the ground.'

Such zeal and activity were most impressive, and Captain Greig was commenting favourably upon them when the landlord of the inn came up and joined in the conversation. He shrugged his shoulders at the Captain's tributes and presented him with two proverbs—'Set a thief to catch a thief' and 'There were six of one and half a dozen of the other.' In his opinion the horse-patrols were not such disinterested messengers of justice as the Greigs supposed. They were, in fact, themselves gentlemen of dubious character—the poachers turned gamekeepers of tradition. Their present zeal, by the innkeeper's account, was not for the apprehension of evil-doers but for the winning of a reward of two hundred pounds offered by a gentleman in the neighbourhood for the capture of one Jem Turner. This Turner, it seemed, had lately burgled the gentleman's house, and being surprised in the thick of his operations, had made off in a hurry, leaving a hat, knife, saw, or some such object behind him. Very carelessly too,

for he had been identified as the owner, and a hue and cry started. Jem, however, had abandoned his old haunts and disappeared, so that no more was heard of him until Alexander mentioned the red waistcoat with white stripes. We are not told, and probably Alexander never heard, if the information brought the man to justice.

After breakfast the Greigs resumed their journey, covering the last eight miles to Gravesend. Here they put up at the Falcon Hotel, where they found, already assembled, some of the passengers for the *Blenden Hall*, which was lying in the river just off the town. None of them showed any anxiety to go on board until the last minute, and all were delighted to hear from Captain Greig that they were not to sail before the following morning. With a view to becoming better acquainted, the whole party arranged to dine together at the hotel.

> 'An invitation was sent on board to such of the officers as could be spared; and the Captain ordered the cutter to be sent off with the ship's band, to play under the dining-room window, which overlooked the river.'

From that window the passengers could plainly see the ship herself.

'The *Blenden Hall* was riding at anchor in the middle of the stream, looking in the most complete order; and many were the praises bestowed on her appearance. At half past five o'clock [the chapter concludes] the band struck up "The Roast Beef of Old England," when we sat down to a most sumptuous dinner, and the evening passed in the enjoyment of all that good feeling by which persons are generally animated when spending the last few hours together in their native country; the hilarity of the scene being considerably augmented by the lively airs of the band, while the certainty that, for months to come, we should have to look to one another for amusement to beguile the weary hours of shipboard, caused each to feel anxious to make himself as agreeable as possible.'

CHAPTER II

## A PASSAGE TO INDIA

In these days those of us who have never made a voyage to the East are at least familiar by hearsay with its circumstances. You board your P. & O. at Tilbury or, snatching a few extra days on land or shirking the discomforts of the Bay of Biscay, you join her at Marseilles. You may strike it rough in the Gulf of Lyons ; you may find it unpleasantly warm in the Red Sea ; you may catch the tail-end of the monsoon in the Indian Ocean. But, fair weather or foul, you look to berth in Bombay harbour some twenty-one days out from Tilbury, or some fourteen days out from Marseilles. During those days you are comfortably housed and handsomely fed ; and if your luck is so far out that you have a following wind down the Red Sea, you can sit under an electric fan and sip an iced drink by day, and sleep out under the stars by night. There are plenty of books and deck sports and amusements, and fellow-passengers enough for you to pick and choose your company. In short, such a voyage to India is merely an agreeable interlude.

Consider, by contrast, the passage you would have made one hundred to one hundred and fifty years ago in an East Indiaman.

To begin with, it was a dangerous business. The percentage of casualties in the Company's fleet from wind and waves and enemy action would appal the twentieth-century broker at Lloyd's. In 1809 the insurance rates were seven guineas per cent. for ship and seven pounds per cent. for cargo of a regular East Indiaman, and nine guineas and nine pounds respectively for what were known as "extra" ships, privately owned but chartered by the Company. Nor were these rates exorbitant. In 1808 and 1809 alone no fewer than ten homeward bound Indiamen were lost by fire or storm, among them such large ships as the *Britannia* (1,200 tons) and the *True Briton* (1,198 tons). Some of the most famous and tragic disasters at sea in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were those of the Company's ships. There was the *Grosvenor* (1782), which went ashore on the east coast of Africa with a king's ransom in her holds; exactly fourteen of her passengers and crew survived the march south to the Dutch settlements. There was the *Halsewell* (1786), driven by storm against the iron coast near St. Alban's Head; all the women and most of the men in her

THE EAST INDIAMAN 'WARREN HASTINGS'
1823

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*From the aquatint engraved by T. Sutherland after W. J. Huggins, in the possession of the Parker Gallery, 28 Berkeley Square, W.1*

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perished, some of the more active alone succeeding in scaling the overhanging cliff. There was the *Kent* (1825), which caught fire on a wild night in the Bay of Biscay and burned almost to the water ; so that it was a question whether she would blow up before she foundered, or founder before the flames reached her magazine. These were examples of well-found ships, with skilful and experienced commanders, which nevertheless went to utter disaster.

A voyage to India, therefore, was in all circumstances a dangerous adventure. Even if the weather was fair there was the risk of enemy action. During the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth century we were, as often as not, at war—generally with the French, and sometimes with the Spaniards, the Dutch and the Americans. The India trade offered the fattest of rewards to the enterprising frigate or privateer, and the Indiamen, even when sailing in convoy, were constantly exposed to attack. When we were at peace, there were the pirates, particularly off the west coast of Africa and the coasts of Arabia, Persia, and India. It was for these reasons that the Indiamen were run man-o'-war fashion. They were manned far beyond the number needed to work the ship ; they carried guns which they used on occasion to good

purpose; their officers wore a special uniform and ranked socially only a little below the King's officers (and financially far above them).

One of the most stirring events in the Company's history was the engagement in the Straits of Malacca between an unescorted convoy of Indiamen, under the command of Captain Dance, and a French squadron consisting of a line-of-battle ship, two frigates and a brig. Now the duty of a merchant captain was not to try to damage the enemy, but to bring his owner's ship and cargo intact into port. Dance, however, saw at once that by running many of his ships would get clear away, but a few of them would inevitably be captured. So he turned and bore down on the French and gave them such a pounding that after a few hours of it they made off in confusion; thus displaying the unusual spectacle of a squadron of warships routed by a fleet of merchantmen. The engagements, of course, did not always end so happily. In 1805 the *Warren Hastings*, a fine Indiaman of 1,200 tons, fought a single-handed duel with a French frigate of forty guns, compelling her to haul off several times and keeping up the engagement for four hours before succumbing to superior numbers and metal.

Such incidents make stirring reading to-day,

but for the peace-loving merchant or passenger were scarcely an agreeable substitute for the deck sports of the modern liner. In time of war the casualties from privateers were heavy ; and in time of peace the Indiaman sometimes met a match in a fighting pirate. The Company's practice of sending all despatches out East in triplicate indicates the official view of the chances of the voyage.

We have seen that the passage was dangerous. It was also very long. The Indiamen were not clippers ; their records cannot compare with those of the splendid ships which in the 'sixties and 'seventies of the last century raced home from China with their freights of tea.[1] The Indiaman was built not for speed but for strength and cargo capacity. According to Mr. Keble Chatterton,[2] four beams to the length was the rule, compared with five or six beams to the length in the famous clippers, and nine or ten in the larger Atlantic liners of to-day. It followed that the Indiamen were steady but slow. A passage even to Bombay was a matter not of weeks but of months. Mr. Chatterton gives the time-table of a ship which left the Thames on

[1] The famous clipper *Ariel* left Gravesend on October 14th, 1866, reached Hong-Kong on January 6th, 1867, and was back in the Thames on September 23rd of that year.

[2] *The Old East Indiamen.*

September 20th, 1746, reached China on July 8th, 1747, started for home on January 12th, 1748, and arrived off Scotland on July 9th, 1748. In 1821 a passage of nineteen months, out and home, was not considered unsatisfactory.

As the voyage was slow, it was both tedious and uncomfortable. The ships themselves, though ugly in line and clumsy in proportions, were among the finest afloat. No expense was spared in either building or equipment. The cost of fitting them out has been estimated at as much as fifty per cent. higher than that of equivalent vessels of private shipowners.[1] But they were, by modern standards, very small, the bigger Indiamen of the regular fleet having a chartered tonnage of about twelve hundred tons. Here was small comfort for anyone, least of all for the bad sailor, to whom a voyage East must have been a long martyrdom.

The food, moreover, though excellent in quality, was unappetising and probably monotonous. Fresh meat and vegetables would be shipped before leaving the Thames, and supplies would be replenished at St. Helena and the Cape, but for the greater part of the voyage the passengers fared on salt meat. Livestock, it is true, was carried, but in quantities necessarily

[1] W. S. Lindsay: *History of Merchant Shipping*.

so limited that it could only be consumed on special occasions. (When the *Kent* was burning, one of the passengers, who visited the cuddy, found it tenanted by a solitary pig which had broken out of its stye and was ranging about over the Brussels carpet.) A cow was always taken, and the calf which accompanied her was turned into veal when the voyage was half over. Plenty of lime juice was carried as a substitute for fresh vegetables, and the stocks of beer, wine and spirits were such as to astonish a more abstemious age. But there was, of course, no ice or tinned food, the supply of fresh water was jealously restricted, and in the tropics the fastidious must have found the heavy fare most unpalatable.

A worse trial than the food was the company. Conceive a society as close as that of a boarding-house in Bloomsbury ; imagine its inmates cooped up together for weeks on end, with no escape and no respite from each other ; meeting every day in the cuddy for meals ; tripping over each other on deck ; becoming disgustingly familiar with each other's tricks and little weaknesses. However big a bore or bounder a man might be, from Gravesend to Bombay you must suffer him for all hours of the day. However fiercely you might have quarrelled, you must compose yourself to

meet your enemy, not now and then, but most of the time. Conceive, too, that any Indiaman would carry its complement of Anglo-Indians, and what ticklish fellow-passengers these old 'Qui His,' with uncertain tempers and autocratic ways, must have made. Can we wonder if, in such circumstances, an Indiaman sometimes reached Bombay with almost as many feuds as there were passengers? Presently we shall see how our friends in the *Blenden Hall* supported this ordeal.

The *Blenden Hall* is described by our author as an East Indiaman; Lieutenant Pepper calls her a 'free trader'[1]; the Bombay Despatches, with greater accuracy, term her a 'private ship.'[2] At one time the Company did not build its own ships, but engaged them, under the most rigorous conditions, from private owners on a tonnage rate. Eventually, to check the profiteering of these owners, the Company built a fleet of its own, to which alone the term of East Indiaman is strictly applicable. It continued, however, to charter on the old arrangement what were known as 'extra ships.' Competition was very keen to supply these 'extra ships,' the privilege being often hereditary in the sense that when

[1] *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIV., 1822.
[2] Bombay Despatches, August 22nd, 1821.

THE EAST INDIAMAN 'THOMAS COUTTS'
Entering Bombay Harbour 1826

*From the aquatint engraved by E. Duncan after W. J. Huggins, in the possession of the Parker Gallery, 28 Berkeley Square, W.1*

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one ship had made her quota of voyages she would be taken off the roll and another would be built, as they termed it, ' on her bottom ' to replace her. Not only was the service well paid, but it afforded the captain and officers opportunities, both lawful and unlawful, of private trading in the Company's well-guarded preserves ; so that a prudent captain might very well acquire a small fortune after making three or four successful voyages to the East. According to Mr. W. B. Whall,[1] a commander often made as much as £10,000 in a voyage, and after a man had made four successful voyages he was expected to retire and give others a chance.

The *Blenden Hall*, then, was one of these ' extra ships,' and Captain Greig her lucky owner. It is a pity that Alexander gives us no description of her. The Bombay Despatches are almost as uncommunicative. They tell us nothing of the ship and very little about her cargo, except that she was carrying a quantity of military stores, 160 tons of iron at a freight of £1 19*s*., and about fifteen tons of woollens at a freight of £2 9*s*. per ton.[2] The Register of Shipping for 1821 and 1822 gives ' *Blenden Hall*, Captain A. Greig, built at Southampton in 1811.' She is described as

[1] *Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. I., No. I.
[2] Bombay Despatches, March 16th, 1821.

a ship of 450 tons, and the owners appear as 'Greig & Co.' The rest we must pick up, as best we may, from casual references in Alexander's narrative of her voyage.

After this digression, dull but necessary, let us return to the Falcon Hotel at Gravesend, where we left the future passengers of the *Blenden Hall* dining sumptuously against the day when they would have neither the inclination nor the opportunity to do themselves well.

CHAPTER III

# THE START

THE next day was Sunday, May 6th.

'We had nearly finished breakfast when a gun from the ship announced that the hour of departure had arrived, and in a few minutes we were all on board. She seemed in excellent condition, and the crew as fine a set of men as I had ever seen.'

The first business was settling in. Alexander had sent on his servant in advance with his heavy luggage, and his cabin, a roomy one on the larboard side of the quarterdeck, was in excellent order. Nowadays, when we go aboard a liner, we expect to find our quarters fully furnished, but in an East Indiaman the first-class passenger was required to bring, in addition to bedding, a sofa (or two chairs), a table and a wash-stand. Alexander tells us that he was delighted with the appearance of his cabin, and particularly with the display of books, fowling-pieces and telescopes, which were the parting gift of his grandfather in Scotland. Never, he reflected, had a young man set out on his adventures better

equipped. His father had dealt generously with him in the matter of outfit, his mother had added scores of trifling luxuries, and—most precious of all in his eyes—he had letters of introduction to all sorts of distinguished people in India who were going to make his fortune for him almost as soon as he got there.

The party from Gravesend had not been long on board before the ship got under way and dropped down the river. On Tuesday the 8th she arrived in the Downs, where, coming eventually to an anchor off Deal, she embarked the remainder of the passengers.

Deal was the Marseilles of 1821. A passenger who postponed joining his ship until she was in the Downs could always snatch an extra two or three days, and sometimes an extra two or three weeks, on shore ; for an outward bound ship would frequently be held up in the Downs for a considerable time while waiting for a favourable wind. It is true that the postponement had its drawbacks for the passenger. The Deal boatman of to-day is an honest enough fellow, but in 1821 he was often a thoroughgoing rascal. If it was a calm day and trade was slack, he would row you out to your ship for five shillings. But if boats were scarce, and there was an onshore wind and a rising sea, and you were obviously in

a hurry, the boatman might extort as much as five guineas for the trip. And what could you do but pay? There you were on the beach; and there, in the offing, was your ship, signalling shorewards her imminent departure; and there was the representative of an exceedingly close corporation demanding the money, if not with menaces, at least with pointed remarks on the danger of delay. So, as a rule and under protest, you paid, and the boatman, who was probably a smuggler in his spare time, took some easy money. Indeed, as we shall see, he sometimes took more than that. Which brings us at once to the episode of Lieutenant Painter, whom we recognise without much difficulty as Lieutenant Pepper, of the Company's Marine Service, the author of the article on the *Blenden Hall* in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. (The article, for reasons which will be obvious, contains no record of the episode; we must look for that to Alexander's more scandalous pen.)

Painter, as we shall call him, had joined the *Blenden Hall* at Gravesend 'as a single man.' He was a blunt, friendly, humorous little fellow, rather under five feet in height, who stepped at once into the good graces of his fellow-passengers. When the ship arrived in the Downs, several of them, including Painter, expressing a wish to go

ashore, Captain Greig ordered the cutter to be manned for them. An hour was fixed at which they were to meet the boat and return to the ship, and when the time came everyone was present except the little Lieutenant. After giving him reasonable grace, the others pushed off back to the ship without him. Two days passed without a sign of the missing passenger. The *Blenden Hall*, meanwhile, had worked a little farther down the coast and was off Deal. Still there was no news of Painter, and the Captain began to be anxious for his safety. On the morning of the third day, however, a boat came alongside with a letter. It was from Painter to the Captain. He apologised for his long absence and explained his silence on the ground that he 'really had not found a moment's spare time to write, having been most actively engaged, not only in commencing, but in actually terminating, a courtship.' He added that he hoped to join the ship before dinner that very day, and would then do himself the honour of introducing his bride to the Captain and passengers. He concluded with a request to be provided with a larger cabin, in which he might, to use his own words, 'stow away his better half.'

We may picture the sensation which such a message created among the already news-hungry

passengers of the *Blenden Hall*. Here they were, only a few days out and still within sight of England, and a promising scandal was already beginning to shape. As the dinner-hour approached the excitement became intense; and when a boat drew near to the ship and signalled that she wished to board, all the passengers were assembled on deck. 'A chair was lowered into the boat, the boatswain piped, and after the lovely burthen had remained a moment suspended in the air, she was safely deposited on the quarter-deck.' Her happy husband, meanwhile, had skipped nimbly up a ladder and was ready to hand her out of her chair.

Alexander's first impression of the lady was very favourable. She was a fine Juno-esque creature, nearly six feet in height, so that beside her diminutive husband she must have resembled a full-rigged ship in the escort of a cutter. Alexander hastened to shake Painter's hand, to wish him joy, and to congratulate him on his excellent taste. For a reward he was at once introduced to the lady, who 'gave me so cordial a salute that she seemed anxious to repay me tenfold for the reception I had given her husband.' Then, after telling Alexander archly that he was 'a great quiz,' she caught her beaming bridegroom by the arm and said, "Come, little Painter, let me

see this fine cabin of yours." There were suppressed titters from the company. 'Little Painter' the poor man became from that moment ; and we may guess that the wit of the male passengers ran to ribaldry from Alexander's rather priggish remark that ' many jokes followed at the expense of the Lieutenant, in which I must confess I felt little inclination to indulge.'

With those few words from bride to bridegroom, half of the truth was out. That air, that accent, that language, those clothes ! There was no possibility, no hope—or fear—of error : *Mrs. Painter was not a lady* ! Heaven alone knew where the little wretch had picked her up, what her parentage might be, or her past. The fact remained that they were condemned to months and months of her company. It was a trick in the worst possible taste to play upon a crowd of helpless and unsuspecting passengers at the very outset of the voyage. We may guess that the ladies—such as they were—who until now had been eyeing each other rather doubtfully, were at once drawn into a momentary alliance by the prospect ; very much as the occupants of a crowded railway compartment quell their mutual resentments and close their ranks when another and plainly undesirable intruder forces his or her way in among them.

But if the passengers had qualms, the happy bridegroom as yet had none. Mrs. Painter had a firm grip on his arm and was hurrying him off to his cabin. Not a whit embarrassed by her talk or her manner, he vanished roaring with laughter.

It was not long before the curiosity of the passengers over the identity of Lieutenant Painter's bride was fully gratified. Two boatmen from Deal had rowed the couple out from the ship, and one of these men had followed Painter up the side and on to the quarterdeck, where he stood his ground after his passengers had disappeared. Alexander wondered what business the man could have on so privileged a spot, but supposed he must be waiting to be paid off; a conclusion which was evidently shared by the officer of the watch, who allowed the man to remain there for some minutes unquestioned.

'As it did not seem probable that the Lieutenant would return very soon, the officer asked the boatman why he stood there. The old man replied, "Why, I only want to say good-bye to Bet; but I suppose the gold swab[1] has already turned her brain." From this I inferred that he was related to the lady, and immediately stopped short and enquired if Mrs. Painter had been long in Deal.

[1] A gold epaulet. As we might say, 'a brass hat.'

"Long?" repeated the old man; "why, woman and child, she has never been farther out of it than she is now, and I'd just as leave she never was, for she seems already to have forgotten her old father. But," continued he, much affected, "she's no occasion to be ashamed of her father: I've been a boatman here these fifty years and brought up a large family respectably, as Captain Greig well knows." Here he was interrupted by the voice of the Lieutenant calling him by name, yet hesitating to approach, as he saw him surrounded by so many, several having joined us out of mere curiosity.

'Not knowing whether to advance or retire, the Lieutenant evinced the greatest possible mortification; indeed, his confusion increased even to a pitiable extent when the old man advanced, holding out one hand to bid him farewell, while with the other he presented a purse of money, saying at the same time, "Give the money to the Captain yourself, Mr. Painter,[1] and God bless you, Sir. I trust you will behave kind to Bet and hope she will sometimes write to her old mother." Here the poor old man's voice became almost inarticulate, and as the Lieutenant's cabin was in front of the deck, on the larboard side, his wife could not only hear, but see through

[1] Apparently his daughter's passage money, which we might suppose Painter himself would have paid.

the Venetian blinds, the grief of her aged parent. Stung with remorse at her unnatural conduct, and her better feelings overcoming her ridiculous vanity, she rushed upon the quarterdeck and, throwing her arms round her father's neck, sobbed aloud. Most of the passengers now retired ; for though they were amused at the commencement of the scene, they could no longer remain to witness its painful termination.'

CHAPTER IV

## DOWN CHANNEL

With the arrival of Mrs. Painter the tale of passengers was complete. On Friday, May 13th (note the ill-omened date), the *Blenden Hall* weighed anchor and stood down Channel under a favourable wind. Off Dungeness, however, the wind shifted into the west again and blew a gale. So she anchored under the point in company with a number of other ships windbound like herself. At seven in the morning of the eighteenth she got under way once more with a favourable breeze, and in the evening lay off Brighton. The wind had fallen away, it was a beautifully clear night, and among the lights on the Marine Parade Alexander could clearly distinguish those of his father's house, where his brothers and sisters were then living. The sight sent him to his bunk with a light heart and the promise of an unlooked-for reunion the next day, as, failing another change in the weather, the Captain's gig was to be alongside early in the morning to take father and son ashore.

But with daylight came disappointment. Alexander was awakened by the violent rolling

of the ship, his swinging cot pitching so heavily that he expected every moment to be dashed against the upper deck beams. Presently his servant came in with the news that a fair wind had sprung up during the night and that the *Blenden Hall* was running before it at a speed of nine knots.

So there was no reunion of the Greig family, and, to add to his depression, Alexander began to suffer acutely from sea-sickness. He had felt squeamish directly the ship was out of the river, but now he met the real thing and liked it as little as any of us. 'I experienced those unpleasant sensations arising from the motion of the ship, which I had frequently heard my friends attempt to describe, but which in point of suffering surpassed anything I could have conceived.' All that day he lay prostrate and miserable, until, at ten o'clock in the evening, his father appeared with the news that the lights of the Lizard were just visible, and that if he wished for "a last view of Old England" he must come up at once. So Alexander struggled into his clothes and up on to the quarterdeck, where he found three of his fellow-passengers assembled for a similar purpose; and together they silently stood watching those lights of England twinkle out in the murk astern.

Alexander then returned to his cabin, flung himself on to his cot and abandoned himself to thoughts so gloomy that it takes him nearly a page of close type to tell us of them. What with sea-sickness and home-sickness, the prospects which had seemed so rosy a few days ago became as pale as the face of about as woebegone a youth as anyone would care to set eyes on.

At seventeen, however, troubles soon pass, and even the pangs of sea-sickness wear off, so that in twenty-four hours Alexander was well enough to venture on deck. The weather had cleared, though it still blew hard and the sea was choppy ; and when, at three o'clock, the band struck up ' The Roast Beef of Old England,' he was able to go below to the cuddy and sit down to his dinner like a man. He was also able to take stock of such of his fellow-passengers as, like himself, were now sufficiently on their sea legs to leave their cabins.

We have already been introduced to Lieutenant Painter and the bride he had collected, almost as an afterthought, from the foreshore at Deal. It may be supposed that the affair of the Painters was the first to disturb the even tenor of the voyage. It was not. The privilege of providing the first scandal must be accorded to Mrs. Lock. This lady was the wife of a commodore in the

Bombay Marine. A passage in the *Blenden Hall* had been booked for her, her two children, her niece and her native servant by an agent who showed a want of candour for which Alexander takes him severely to task. As the wife of a commodore Mrs. Lock's standing was unexceptionable, but—the agent carefully omitted to mention one horrid little fact. The Commodore had married, not merely beneath him, but in the country, that is, in India. 'The lady was of that colour which would preclude any of my fair countrywomen from engaging a passage in the same ship.' Alexander does not tell us whether she was entirely native or merely lacked, as the saying has it, some annas in the rupee; probably the former, since there was apparently no possibility of pretending that she was a European. Her arrival at Gravesend had evidently been followed by a commotion of cancelled passages, several ladies preferring to wait for another ship rather than to travel in such doubtful company. This was not just snobbishness. In the course of the long voyage it would have been impossible to avoid intimacy, yet, on arrival at Bombay, an iron custom would have demanded that Mrs. Lock must be dropped like a hot potato. The ladies might get to know her—even to like her—very well in the *Blenden Hall*,

but as soon as the ship berthed at Bombay they could not know her at all. We must therefore ascribe to Mrs. Lock the fact, upon which Alexander passes a pompous comment, 'that the *Blenden Hall* should have been so unfortunate as not to have been honoured by conveying any among her female passengers coming strictly under the denomination of refined.' This is mild language. Mrs. Lock is described as 'an immensely corpulent woman of colour, who spoke very broken English,' and had been in the employment of the Commodore before she married him. Her appearance at Gravesend, at any rate, was enough to scare all the 'refined' ladies off the ship, and Captain Greig, indignant though he must have been at the trick that had been played on him, was powerless. The lady had booked her passage; she flatly refused to give way; there was no regulation excluding passengers of colour; and there was an end of it. She brought with her two children, a boy and a girl, and a niece, Miss Morton, who was as dusky as herself. The last was not fourteen, but old for her years, an attractive girl with an affable disposition and pleasant manners, so that, colour notwithstanding, she soon became a general favourite. She was sorely handicapped by her aunt's unfortunate habit of blurting out her most

secret thoughts. Her most secret thoughts about Miss Morton might be summed up in the one word ' marriage.' Like many other mothers and aunts who have since made the passage to India, Mrs. Lock was full of hope that Bombay would find her charge an engaged woman. This she made perfectly clear at the outset to her fellow-passengers, for in a business-like way she took an early opportunity of announcing across the dinner-table that a dowry amounting to many thousands of rupees was waiting for some lucky man. The bachelors of the *Blenden Hall*, however, did not regard this as a ' firm offer ' : the rupees were the Commodore's and the niece was most obviously Mrs. Lock's. So there were many rumours, but no takers. Peggy, the native servant, was a mere child, and as idle and slovenly as her mistress.

Next we must notice Quartermaster and Mrs. Hormby. Hormby himself was a promoted ' ranker,' who had received his commission in the 67th Foot only a few days before the *Blenden Hall* sailed. Starting as a private soldier, he had worked his way up into what was one of the most lucrative of military jobs ; for it was an unenterprising regimental quartermaster in those days, indeed, as well as later, who did not make a modest fortune East of Suez. Hormby sprang

to immediate popularity on board. He was one of those people who become at once the 'life and soul' of any company they join. They may be encountered any winter at one of the smaller Swiss hotels. He was bluff, friendly and indomitably social; so gregarious that when he could not find a passenger to entertain he would stroll for'ard and tell ghost stories, of which he had a vast collection, to the crew, some of whom he put into a fine fright with his blood-curdling yarns. Mrs. Hormby was a quiet, respectable, unassuming girl of eighteen. Coming as she did from the same class as her husband, the prospect of Mrs. Lock had not roused in her any social apprehensions; and as she was exceedingly pretty and behaved with unvarying propriety, everyone came to like and respect her.

Then there was Dr. Law, 'a very particular old bachelor.' He had been for many years a surgeon in the Royal Navy, and when retired on to the half-pay list had obtained an appointment in the East India Company's military service. He was on his way out to join his regiment, and in his less crotchety moments, which generally occurred after he had had a favourable encounter with a bottle of whisky, he was fond of alluding to the fact that he had once been attached to a ship which had been attached to the ship which

had carried no less a person than Lord Amherst on his famous embassy to China.

As for the others, officers and passengers alike, let us deal with them as they enter the story ; and let us pass at once to the unfortunate scene in the cuddy on the day when the *Blenden Hall* was burying her nose in the green seas of the Atlantic, and Alexander, with restored appetite, found himself able, for the first time since losing the lights of Brighton, to respond to the inviting strains of ' The Roast Beef of Old England.'

They sat down sixteen to table, including the Captain, the chief and second officers, Dr. George Symmers (the ship's surgeon), and a few of the stouter-hearted of the passengers. Among these, to the general surprise, was Mrs. Lock, who would have been a wiser woman to have stayed in her cabin. By an unfortunate error in tact, she had been placed next to Dr. Law, and although this is the sort of thing that happens inevitably to ' particular old bachelors,' he hardly troubled to conceal his distaste for his neighbour. So dinner began. The ship was rolling heavily ; the menu was excellent—for people in normal health ; Mrs. Lock grew more and more sallow of face ; Dr. Law grew more and more apprehensive, particularly as the woman would turn and describe her symptoms to him. Presently

there came a lee lurch of such violence as to throw several of the diners clean out of their seats. Mrs. Lock lost her balance and the last shreds of her control, ' and falling with her arms round the Doctor's neck, held fast for support and discharged over him at the same time that which she afterwards assured us she had fully intended to have bestowed on the fishes.' It was a painful incident, on which the squeamish will not wish to linger. The Doctor, not unnaturally, was furious. He stamped, and swore in broad Scots, and struggled vainly to escape from his persecutor, who, overcome with confusion, hung on resolutely to him and poured out apologies. But as each apology was followed by a fresh spasm, and she never relaxed her embrace, and the rest of the company was by this time roaring with laughter, matters grew worse rather than better. At last, with a despairing effort, the Doctor tore himself loose from her grasp and stumped out of the cuddy in a towering rage. Captain Greig, with commendable chivalry, then led Mrs. Lock back to the cabin she should never have left.

Alexander tells us that no one's appetite was any the better for this mischance, as we may well believe ; but dinner did not end without a further contretemps, in which was involved that

other lady of scandalous debate, Mrs. Painter. The cloth had been taken from the table when Mr. Gibson, a young cadet who was sitting next to Alexander, thought to pay her a compliment by calling down the table and asking her, in the custom of the time, to take wine with him. Mrs. Painter, who was a stranger to such courtesies, at once called back, " I'm much obliged to you, sir, but I'm not dry," a reply which provoked a general titter. After dinner Painter evidently gave his wife a little instruction in the manners of polite society. But a little learning is proverbially a dangerous thing, and the lady only learnt half her lesson. On the following day, anxious to return Mr. Gibson's compliment, and to show that no offence had been intended by her refusal, she filled her glass and called down the table to him, " Sir, I drinks towards your very good health." This time there was no titter, but a hearty roar of laughter, in which the newly married couple, in no way abashed by the solecism, themselves joined with gusto.

CHAPTER V

# THE BAY AND AFTER

THE *Blenden Hall* had started down Channel with a favourable wind. This had freshened rapidly into a gale, and on May 22nd, when she entered the Bay of Biscay, she was careering through mountainous seas under a closely reefed foresail. Once more the passengers were forced back into their cabins, although Alexander managed to struggle on deck for a few hours of every day. As they drew south, however, the weather moderated, and on June 1st, when Madeira was sighted, the sea was calm, the *Blenden Hall* had every sail set, and even the worst sailors among the passengers turned up for dinner in the cuddy. Most of them, Alexander observed maliciously, were none the better, either in looks or in temper, for their days of confinement and misery, but after this unfavourable start the social life on board had its first feeble beginnings.

Even Mrs. Lock was herself again. But even Mrs. Lock was unable to persuade Dr. Law to resume his seat by her side in the cuddy. She did her best, although her efforts at persuasion, in such English as she could command, were not

well conceived for their purpose. "Now do you come, Doctor," she urged him. "No? Well, me thought you good Christian, but you no forgive, you no very good, else why you no come back?"

The Doctor was obdurate to her pleadings. He assured her of his complete forgiveness, but, storm or calm, nothing would induce him to risk a repetition of that earlier misadventure. At last he became so enraged by her importunacy that he took no further notice of her.

Alexander's interest was more for the foibles of his shipmates than for the life on board, of which he tells us little. It is one of the annoyances of history that the chronicler so often ignores the routine and the commonplace, as either too familiar or too unimportant to be worthy of record; whereas in fact the past lives again rather in the humdrum happenings from day to day than in more notable events. We must therefore supplement what Alexander tells us with such information as we are fortunate enough to have from other sources.

The life of passengers on board an Indiaman was governed by strict regulations, a copy of which was handed to each as he embarked. Social intercourse was restricted in the main to the hours of daylight. No fires of any kind were

allowed after eight o'clock in the evening, except in the sick bay, and all lights were put out at nine between decks, and in the cabins by ten. Dinner, served in the *Blenden Hall* at three o'clock, was more generally at two, and was the chief event of the day. It consisted of three courses and dessert. No liquor could be specially ordered, but wine and beer were provided as a matter of course, and twice a week champagne was served as a treat. The meal itself, apart from such unrehearsed episodes as we have already noticed, was a ceremonious business, the Captain sitting at the head of a long table and exercising such authority as is vested in the Colonel of an officers' mess in the Army. Indeed, the comfort as well as the security of the passengers depended very much on the character and disposition of the Captain, whose slightest word was law and who was held responsible to the Company for the good conduct of the passengers as much as for the safety of the ship. But, so long as they observed the Company's rules, the passengers were encouraged to enjoy themselves as best they could. They had brought their own servants, furniture, books and amusements ; at eleven in the morning and nine in the evening there was 'grog,' the contemporary equivalent of the cocktail ; there were dances, if the number of ladies on board

permitted ; there were theatricals to be arranged ; there was the ship's band ; and, when the Line was crossed, much was made of the time-honoured ceremonies. The old stagers, who had made the passage before, could exchange reminiscences in the manner that always has been and always will be loved of Anglo-Indians ; and for the 'griffins' like Alexander, making their first voyage East, there was all the novelty of a new experience, of strange ships to be sighted, of strange fish to be caught, of strange islands and countries, of an adventure that had only just opened.

If time sometimes hung heavy on the hands of the passengers, there was always plenty to occupy the crew. It was the rule that an Indiaman should be kept as clean and smart as one of His Majesty's ships. Lindsay, in his *History of Merchant Shipping*,[1] gives the daily routine :

> 'The internal economy and discipline on board of the Company's ships were much more perfect than in any other merchant vessels of the period. The crew or seamen of each were divided into two watches, starboard and larboard ; the officers into three watches. Each watch of the former had, during the night, four hours' rest below and four hours' duty on deck.

[1] Vol. II., pp. 477–9.

At half past six a.m. the watch on deck commenced to wash and clean decks ; at half past seven the hammocks were piped up and stowed in the hammock nettings round the waist by the quartermasters. At eight o'clock all hands breakfasted, after which they commenced the ordinary duties of the day. These consisted, when the men were not required to set, shorten or trim sails, of work of the most multifarious description, such as setting up rigging, shifting or repairing sails, splicing ropes, making spun yarn, weaving mats, painting, tarring, greasing masts, and so forth. Twice every week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, they cleaned and holystoned the 'tween-decks, in the fore part of which they slept and had their food, the whole crew being divided into messes of eight men each, who had a space allotted to them between the guns, where their mess utensils were arranged. When these cleaning and scouring operations were finished, the 'tween-decks were carefully inspected by the commander and surgeon, to see that everything was clean and in order, and that all mess kids, brass pots and kettles, tin pannikins and other utensils were properly scoured and polished.

' On Sunday no work was allowed to be performed except what was urgent and necessary ; and on the morning of that day the crew was mustered and inspected before assembling at

prayers, which every person on board was expected to attend in his best attire. Dinner was served at noon ; after that the men, on week-days, resumed their work until the dog watches, which commenced at four p.m. . . . On Saturdays, during these hours, if the weather permitted, they had their dance or songs or music, drinking health and wealth, long life and happiness to their " wives and sweethearts." . . . One day every week was allotted to washing their clothes ; and once every month they scrubbed their hammocks. . . . When punishments were inflicted, which was too frequently the case for the most trifling offences, the lash from the brawny arm of a boatswain's mate over the bare back and shoulders of the delinquent was much more severely felt than would have been the lash of a drummer's mate (*i.e.* in a ship of the Royal Navy). Three dozen of such lashes was no uncommon punishment.'

Such was the life. The *Blenden Hall* being an 'extra' ship, and a small one at that, we may suppose that the discipline was less severe and the routine not so cut and dried as in one of the ships of the Company's regular service. But we may take Lindsay's picture as being in the main applicable.

As the *Blenden Hall* drew south, the calm sea

and fine weather worked the old miracle ; and many of the passengers who, not so many days back, would have almost counted it a service to be thrown overboard, discovered with a faint surprise that life on board ship could be quite an agreeable affair. They caught sharks and flying fish and, regardless of the fate of the Ancient Mariner, shot an occasional albatross. The novices set themselves to learn Hindustani ; and although there were no deck games in the modern sense, music, singing and cards diverted the idle hours of the afternoon. Every evening after tea the band was ordered aft and there was dancing. On the first evening, Major Reid of the Poona Auxiliaries led out Mrs. Painter, who made up for any deficiency in grace or experience by the athletic vigour with which she went through her paces. Even Mrs. Lock took the deck, though not, we may guess, with Dr. Law as her partner ; unfortunately, she ' always happened to go to the right hand when she should have gone to the left, and *vice versa*, which greatly disconcerted her more accomplished friend, Mrs. Painter, who, as she expressed herself, considered herself " a tip-top hand at it." ' However, the two ladies had struck up a close friendship and were always visiting each other's cabins, so that for the present there was no jealousy or ill-feeling.

On the 3rd of June the Peak of Teneriffe appeared in the sky, and on the next day Palma was sighted and passed. And it is just about this time that we get the first indications that all was not quite as it should have been aboard the *Blenden Hall*. Alexander was a dutiful and devoted son. In the whole of his book there is not a word of criticism of his father ; yet much that was to happen can only be explained on the assumption that Captain Greig was not the most perfect of commanders. He may have been too old for his job, or he may never have excelled at it ; the fact remains that he had not proper control of his crew and no control at all of his passengers.

The trouble, indeed, began with the passengers. It was, at the outset, trivial enough, but it was the kind of nonsense that a firm and prudent captain would have stopped at once. Obviously, when twenty-four people, most of them strangers to each other, are cooped up for weeks within the limits of a small ship, there is certain to be friction ; but, with a wise authority, there should be no more than that. In the *Blenden Hall* there was a good deal more. Quarrelling became a diversion almost as recognised as cards, and the cuddy was soon divided into warring cliques and parties which formed and re-formed with

monotonous persistence. The men were the first, though not the worst, offenders. They began to exchange polite little notes on gilt-edged paper, requesting the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another ; and since the meetings were forbidden at sea, they were post-dated to the first port at which the *Blenden Hall* might touch. Even Alexander, youngster though he was, who assures us that he made a point of holding private entertainments twice a week in his cabin, to which he asked his shipmates in rotation, and who was quite unconscious of giving offence to anybody, received one or two challenges. Not that they troubled him ; on the contrary, he rather welcomed them as a tribute to his years and consequence, and looked forward to meeting his challengers in bloodless though honourable affray at the Cape of Good Hope, and to the accounts of the affairs which would trickle back to England and impress his family and friends.

Leaving the Canary Islands astern, the *Blenden Hall* jogged on south before the north-east trade, and presently fell in with two of the finest vessels in the Company's service, the *Thomas Grenville* and *Marquis Wellington*, outward bound for Bengal and China.[1] They were magnificent

[1] According to Lieutenant Pepper's account, the *Thomas Grenville* was spoken two days after the *Marquis Wellington*.

ships of close upon 1,700 tons burthen, and their decks were crowded with troops and passengers. The *Blenden Hall* drew near enough to converse with them, first with the help of a speaking-trumpet, and later with the unaided voice. In the evening they parted company. The two regular Indiamen were much the faster ships, and left the smaller *Blenden Hall* far astern.

As the ship drew near to the Equator the wind dropped. They were in the doldrums or, as Mrs. Lock put it, ' near latitude nothing.' Day succeeded day, breathless, cloudless and utterly wearisome. We glibly quote :

> Day after day, day after day,
> We stuck, nor breath nor motion ;
> As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean.

In our time the lines mean little, but to the sailing-ship they told a familiar story—of oppressive heat, of a glassy swell, of grinding monotony, of a shortage of water, of weeks in which it seemed that the ship was fixed for eternity in one spot on a waste of calm and oily waters, when the world was standing still and the sun marched across the sky with the beat of a sentry. For three weeks the *Blenden Hall* lay becalmed, or drifted almost imperceptibly, or caught the faintest flutter of a breeze and slipped a mile or two south before it

fell away into stillness. In three weeks she never sighted another ship, so that we may imagine the excitement when, early one morning, a sail appeared on the horizon. The stranger came slowly up ; but presently the wind dropped altogether and the two ships lay becalmed at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from each other. Captain Greig then ordered the jolly-boat to be lowered, and sent Alexander, Dr. Law and another passenger to pay a mid-ocean call. The newcomer proved to be the brig *Daphne*, bound for Madras. The Captain and passengers gave the visitors a great welcome, the second officer being sent off at once to the *Blenden Hall* with a note to Captain Greig asking him to dinner in the *Daphne* that afternoon. Although the invitation was declined, Alexander and the other two were allowed to remain and accept the hospitality offered ; which they did with the greatest pleasure. ' I do not remember,' Alexander confesses, ' to have spent a day in a more agreeable manner.' We can well believe him. After three weeks of the doldrums the change of ship, of food and of company must have been most refreshing. At three o'clock they sat down to a most excellent dinner, which they enjoyed so much that it was nearly dark before they could tear themselves away ; and

they left a pressing invitation to their hosts to a return dinner in the *Blenden Hall* the next day.

Alexander here comments on the curious attraction between two large floating bodies. In spite of the dead calm, the two ships drew so close to one another during the afternoon that it became necessary to man the cutters and tow their heads round in order to avoid a collision. As both ships were rolling heavily in the long swell, they might have done each other serious damage had they clashed.

To Alexander's disappointment, the return visit of the *Daphne* to the *Blenden Hall* never took place. During the night a light breeze sprang up, and at daylight the *Daphne* was almost out of sight on the eastern horizon. The *Blenden Hall*, as usual, was left behind.

CHAPTER VI

# CROSSING THE LINE

A DAY or two after the encounter with the *Daphne* the *Blenden Hall* reached the Equator. This was an occasion to be celebrated in accordance with tradition, and Alexander tells us that the 'griffins,' or cadets, were duly roused from their beds at an early hour that they might look through a telescope across the end of which a strand of hair had been fixed. Hatchets were then sharpened for the cutting of this formidable obstacle, and various other tricks were played on young and credulous passengers.

All this, of course, should have been a mere prelude to the principal ceremony, the shaving and ducking of Father Neptune's new subjects, to which everybody—even those who had not crossed the Line before and would therefore be the victims—had been looking forward. Great was the disappointment, accordingly, when it became known that the Captain had vetoed the customary celebration. His reason for so doing throws further light on the state of discipline aboard. For some time past the cabin stores

had been disappearing, but who was pilfering them, or when, or how, was a mystery. At length a watch was set, and on the night before the *Blenden Hall* crossed the Line, four of the seamen were caught in the act of carrying off figs, prunes, cherry bounce and other delicacies. Among the offenders was no less a person than Father Neptune himself, who now, instead of celebrating his day of royalty with stolen food and drink, kept it in irons. Others volunteered at once to take his place and play his part, but the Captain, declaring his conviction that at least a third of the crew were implicated in the thefts, decided that there should be no ceremony.

This decision provoked the more grumbling from the elaborate preparations which had been made for'ard, and from the talk and chaff which had been going the rounds aft. Alexander tells us that on the 28th of June, the day before the Line was crossed, he was on the fo'c'sle trying to bait a shark, when suddenly an appalling head popped out of the forehatch. The face was streaked with black and red paint, surmounted by a large white bonnet, at least two feet high, and surrounded by an immense bunch of oakum curls. As Alexander sat, astonished and even a little alarmed by this monstrous apparition, it called below in a shrill voice: "Neptune, a

mortal approaches," thus disclosing to him that he was in the presence of Amphitrite herself. Feeling himself something of an intruder, he hastened to pay his footing with the offer of a bottle of rum, from which Amphitrite and her spouse might drink a prosperous voyage to the *Blenden Hall*. Whereupon the lady replied with a strong Irish accent : " Lord love the young Captain ! That we will, and health and long life to his honour into the bargain ! "

On returning aft, Alexander sent his servant for'ard with the promised present and a few pounds of tobacco. That was all that came of the ceremony of crossing the Line, though it is possible that more happened in the fo'c'sle than was known to the quarterdeck.

The *Blenden Hall* crossed the Line in a dead calm. She was in longitude 25° W., in fact, not very far from St. Paul's Rocks ; it was very hot, and Alexander reports that the ship was surrounded by nautilus or ' Portuguese men-of-war,' pretty little floating bladders of varied hues.

Another long and dreary period followed. A current had been carrying the *Blenden Hall* far to the west of her true course, rather nearer to the coast of South America than to that of Africa. To reach the Cape of Good Hope it was now necessary for her to pick up the south-east trade

and to set a south-westerly course past Ascension Island and St. Helena.

Meanwhile the passengers were not coming through the ordeal of the voyage with conspicuous credit. The wrangling in the cuddy was incessant; a perfect epidemic of threats and challenges raged among the men, while the company was entertained and scandalised by a series of pitched battles between Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter. These two ladies had begun by vowing eternal friendship, but in the tedium of the voyage the vow was soon forgotten. They quarrelled—not politely, like ladies, with chilling silences or brief, cutting remarks, but noisily, like washerwomen. Their truces were as sudden as their onslaughts, and during an armistice they became so sisterly to each other that it was difficult to believe that an hour or two earlier they had been in fierce conflict. Their relations changed with bewildering rapidity, but, fortunately or unfortunately, there could never be any doubt in the cuddy as to whether at any particular moment Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter were or were not on speaking terms. Indeed, the expression itself is misleading, since the ladies addressed each other more frequently and far more loudly when they were at war than when they were at peace.

In these exchanges each lady started, if this were possible, with a heavy handicap. Everybody had seen and heard Mrs. Painter's father, who, as Mrs. Lock was fond of recalling, was 'a common boatman.' Painter, moreover, was but a lieutenant, whereas Lock was a commodore, a difference in rank of immense significance to sticklers in the etiquette of the Services. This distinction, too, was made very plain to Mrs. Painter. That lady, however, discovered plenty of weapons for a counter-offensive, and must be allowed to have had the better of most of the encounters, since, as a rule, Mrs. Lock lost her temper first. For Mrs. Lock was a lady of colour —in the language of the day, 'black'; and although this circumstance by itself might scarcely have counterbalanced the Deal boatman and a marriage, as it were, between tides, Mrs. Lock committed a tactical blunder of first-class importance. It seems that, in the course of one of their disputes, Mrs. Painter, doubtless stung by the suggestion that a marriage on the foreshore of Deal was not much of a marriage, presumed to make insinuations about Mrs. Lock and her commodore. Was she, after all, his lawfully wedded wife? Was it possible? Was it not much more likely that——? Mrs. Lock, blind with rage at the insult, hastened to produce proof.

She had her certificate—her " 'tifcate," as she called it. Her slanderer should see it, and at once ; and at Bombay should be mulcted in heavy damages for " def'mation " of character. Out came the certificate, and with it, at one glance from Mrs. Painter, Mrs. Lock's guilty secret. It was true that she was the Commodore's lawful wife, but unfortunately the date on the certificate and the age of her eldest child told a story almost as much to Mrs. Painter's purpose as her original suggestion. Plainly there had been a time when Mrs. Lock was no better than she should have been ; and although the Commodore (Alexander cynically observes, ' with more principle than good sense ') had ultimately made an honest woman of her, the horrible fact remained, and was thenceforth the most formidable weapon in Mrs. Painter's armoury. Of course, that lady would observe with a charity more maddening than any abuse, Mrs. Lock could not help it. She was black, and it was not her fault if she acted up (or down) to her colour. At which Mrs. Lock would break in indignantly, " Ah, me like black ; black be good standing colour. Lock, he like black best—great many gentlemen in Bombay like black best." (It is to be feared that this last statement was true of the time, when an illicit establishment East of

Suez was not frowned on so severely as it is to-day.)

This discovery, then, set the odds heavily in Mrs. Painter's favour. Ever afterwards, at the first clash in each of their numerous encounters, she would remember that she was a respectable woman and should not be asked to keep company with such as Mrs. Lock ; and so provoking was her air of aggrieved virtue that more than once it became necessary to part the two ladies by force ; only to discover the following morning that Mrs. Painter had forgotten her respectability and Mrs. Lock her action for 'def'mation,' and that the pair were bosom friends once more.

CHAPTER VII

# A THREAT OF PIRACY

On the evening of the 16th of July, when to the general relief the wind was blowing strongly from the south-east, a sail was sighted on the weather bow. As the stranger came up, it was seen that she was a brig, and through a telescope British colours could be distinguished flying from her main. The satisfaction which, after weeks of scanning an empty horizon, everyone felt at falling in with another ship, was soon qualified by curiosity at the stranger's peculiar manœuvres. After tacking and bearing down on the *Blenden Hall*, as if anxious to speak her, she hauled down her ensign and 'gave other unequivocal indications to the practised eye of a sailor that clearly denoted no friendly disposition.'

Captain Greig, attended by the second and third officers, was closely watching the brig, and presently the second mate jumped from the poop and ordered the boatswain to pipe all hands on deck. A moment later the chief officer, who had been up in the mizzen rigging surveying the brig through his glass, came down and declared

his opinion that she was about to attack the *Blenden Hall*.

As in 1820 Britain was at peace with the world, this meant, in a word, piracy. Now the Indiaman, as we have seen, was equipped to deal with the ordinary pirate, for whom as a rule she would be more than a match ; although sometimes the tables were turned, as when Bowen boarded and took the *Pembroke*, or as when the notorious Captain England, after a terrific engagement, captured the *Cassandra*. But the Indiaman was a tough customer to tackle, and the pirate, unless he was exceptionally strong and the Indiaman small, or he had a chance of surprising her, would leave her alone. As Indiamen went, the *Blenden Hall* was a small ship, so we may suppose that the strange brig decided to try conclusions with her.

' In one instant,' Alexander writes, ' all was hurry and excitement, but some little delay took place in getting to the magazine. The Captain made urgent appeals to the men to keep perfectly cool and collected. He encouraged them by pointing out the comparatively insignificant size of the vessel in pursuit, and that one broadside from our guns would effectually do their business.'

Nevertheless, Alexander's ever-watchful eye took in that many of the men had little liking

for the fight in prospect. Each, as he came up, was given a revolver and a brace of pistols by the gunner, the passengers being encouraged to arm themselves in like manner. Boarding-pikes were laid by handy; and the ship's six 18-pounders were loaded with grape and canister.

In the midst of all the stir Alexander had time to note the varying conduct of his fellow-passengers in this, the first crisis of the voyage. His observations were not, on the whole, flattering to them. Some, he says, 'were running one way, some another way, many, as might naturally be expected, sitting together, almost frightened to death.' A few were, or pretended to be, delighted at the adventure, and talked big of the 'set-to' they would have and how they would board and capture the pirate. Most of the passengers were collected in the cabin, where Dr. Law, 'who had since tea made extensive inroads into some very fine old Scotch whisky, was walking about with a drawn sword, offering to wager any man a hundred guineas that he would be the first to board the enemy and show us a fine specimen of British courage.' But even the spectacle of the pot-valiant doctor could not comfort poor Mrs. Lock, who 'was running about sobbing in a most piteous style, affirming that she was sure they would take and devour

us, for that a friend of hers had been eaten alive on a similar occasion.'

As the wind freshened, the pursuing brig seemed to lose way. Alexander, examining her carefully through his telescope, could see that she was armed like a ship of war, although only four or five hands were showing themselves on deck. But this was a very old dodge with pirates, as is shown by the illustration facing this page.

Night came on, with the chase still continuing. The brig made no great progress in overhauling the Indiaman, perhaps because the latter really had the legs of her, but more probably because she was out for easy money and was discouraged by the warlike preparations of Captain Greig and his crew. When it was quite dark, the *Blenden Hall* altered course a few points, pressing on with all sail and without lights ; and at dawn the next morning the brig was out of sight. We may console ourselves with the thought that she was a poor sort of pirate. The great days of piracy were over, such as remained in the business being small fry who clung to the coast and only molested ships even smaller than themselves.

On the following evening the *Blenden Hall* was again becalmed, and so stayed for some days, though in fact a strong westerly current continued to sweep her out of her course. On the 22nd of

PIRATES DECOYING AN AMERICAN SHIP

*facing page* 74

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July she was in latitude 36.30° south, longitude 15.11° west—somewhere, that is, in the neighbourhood of Tristan da Cunha ; and a light breeze springing up at noon, Captain Greig steered west to get a sight of the islands and check his reckoning.[1]

On the next day he made his landfall ; it was to be easily the most disastrous in all his experience of the sea.

[1] See Appendix I.

CHAPTER VIII

# SHIPWRECK

At about ten o'clock on the morning of July 22nd, just after breakfast, the passengers collected on the quarterdeck to get a glimpse of the islands of Tristan da Cunha. 'The Captain assured us that we ought to see them distinctly, as they were of immense height, being visible thirty leagues at sea.' Presently floating seaweed was passed, but as yet, even from the foretop, there was no sign of land. The *Blenden Hall* was making about five knots, but as a precaution the order was given to shorten sail; and this had hardly been done when a man from the mizzen top sang out, "Breakers on the starboard bow!"

An attempt was at once made to bring the ship to the wind, when it was found that she would not answer her helm, which had become entangled in seaweed. At this moment the wind dropped suddenly. Captain Greig then gave orders to boxhaul the ship, with the idea of clearing the breakers on the other tack; and when this manœuvre failed for lack of wind, the cutter and jolly-boat were lowered and manned, and sent with tow-ropes to bring the ship's head

round. But the swell was so heavy that the boats were tossed about like corks and made no headway, while little by little the *Blenden Hall* was being driven towards the breakers, an ominous streak of white and broken water now clearly visible from the quarterdeck.

The position was critical. Although, Alexander assures us, Captain Greig continued to give his orders with the utmost coolness, his face betrayed the imminence of the danger. He now commanded the chain-cable to be bent, although the man who was taking soundings in the forechains could not find the bottom. But the ship was drifting inexorably in. The breakers were roaring around. The boats were impotent to counteract the drive of the current. At length, in desperation, the anchor was let go, but the depth was still too great for it to grip. And the next moment the *Blenden Hall* struck, the shock being so violent that the helmsman was flung from his post at the wheel on the poop-deck down the after-hatch.

That is Alexander's version. Really, if it were all the information we had, we should be entitled to regard the shipwreck as one of the most unaccountable, or at least unnecessary, on record. Here we have an experienced captain, between ten and eleven on a fine morning, with all the

Atlantic for sea-room, approaching a group of islands to check his reckoning, and promptly piling up his ship on them. How did it happen? How could it have happened with a captain who was not mad or drunk or incompetent? As we might expect, Alexander has not a word to say against his father, but it is surprising to find the independent accounts in *Chambers's Journal* and *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* similarly free from criticism. But in these at least we find the explanation which Alexander, by one of his occasional lapses, has omitted to give us. We find, as indeed we might expect, that it was a very misty morning. A mist is only mentioned by Alexander, quite casually, when the ship is already aground, and then as though it had only just appeared. The anonymous author of the article in *Chambers's Journal*, however, after adding the information that the nearness of the land was first reported by one of the passengers, who was up on deck earlier than usual and noticed quantities of seaweed, tells us that the weather was ' extremely hazy though moderate.' And Pepper, in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, states that ' we found the atmosphere too thick to discern any object.'

Yet, although we may take it that there was a good deal of mist about, as often there is in those

waters, the weather had been clear enough early in the morning for an altitude to be taken with the chronometer and for the Captain to invite the passengers to the quarterdeck to see the islands ; and it might be supposed, if the mist was bad that no captain in his senses would have groped in it for so dangerous a landfall as Tristan da Cunha, which he was only too likely to discover by running into it. Granted, however, that the morning was thick and that by an extraordinary failure in seamanship Captain Greig took the risk of standing in to the islands, the ensuing disaster is easily explained. The islands, being volcanic, rise sheer out of the Atlantic. There is no gently shelving shore, but a rampart of cliffs, protected by outposts of reefs that rise, like a mountain range, steeply from the ocean bed. At one moment a ship would be secure in many fathoms, and at the next she would be caught and doomed. So the wind fell away, a powerful swell drove the *Blenden Hall* inshore, the boats were lowered too late, the anchor was useless. This much we may conclude. It explains the disaster, without exonerating the Captain.

The ship's situation was hopeless, and to add to its horror the mist, now first mentioned by Alexander, wrapped her round, while on every side was the roar of breakers, indicating that, if

she came off one reef, she would merely slip on to another. To complete the disaster, her boats, which until she struck had persisted in their futile efforts to bring her head round, now slipped their tow-ropes and vanished into the fog. Afterwards their crews declared that they found it impossible to regain the ship and were swept away by a strong current. Their shipmates were furious at this desertion, and, lining the decks, hurled vain imprecations into the mist. Only the long-boat was now left, and as it had been used for housing the livestock and was full of cows and sheep, some time was lost in getting it clear. And then the labour was wasted, for scarcely had she been started from the chocks than she was stove in by the violence of the waves.

The *Blenden Hall*, her back broken, now lay at the mercy of the riotous seas that pounded her helpless hull against the rocks. The ship, explains Pepper, ' having keeled on the starboard side, exposed us to the fury of the sea.' Her poop fell in and was in part washed off, she filled with water, and, although her masts were cut away and sent over the side to ease her, she started to break up with alarming rapidity. There was no chance of safety in those boiling waters, no sign of land through that enveloping mist. Even Captain Greig now abandoned hope.

He took leave of his passengers and crew, assuring them that, with the help of his officers, he had done all that human skill could suggest, and begging them to prepare themselves to meet an inevitable fate. With which cheering injunction he shook hands with them one by one, his parting with Dr. McLennan, with whom he had struck up a warm friendship during the voyage, being particularly affecting.

Next, turning back to more mundane matters, he ordered all to go forward on to the fo'c'sle, a wise move, since scarcely had it been carried out than a heavy sea struck the ship and she parted amidships, the stern being carried off a short distance and then engulfed.

Crew and passengers were now huddled on the fo'c'sle, where they waited for a death that seemed unescapable. The waves were sweeping over them, tearing first one and then another from his precarious hold. At one time Alexander saw his father washed right off the wreck among the floating spars and thought him lost, but the old man somehow struggled back to comparative safety. In this plight they remained for some hours, uncertain whether the fo'c'sle would break up beneath them before it was torn bodily from the reef on which it was wedged, and only certain that there was no prospect of deliverance.

In the early afternoon came the first glint of hope. The mist lifted a little, the sun broke out in full splendour, and they found to their surprise that they were quite close to the shore and that a great cliff was towering above the wreck.[1] Even so, between them and safety lay a stretch of broken water through which it seemed impossible that the stoutest of swimmers could pass. But they were heartened by the sight of land and of people standing on the shore who, as they rightly supposed, were the men from the missing boats. If by some means or other a line could be passed from the wreck to the beach, safety was still possible. Their first attempts at this, though ingenious, were unavailing. Some of the sheep which were left in the fo'c'sle were taken out and launched over the side, each with a line lashed round it ; some pigs, in defiance of the tradition that a pig, when it tries to swim, cuts its throat, were sent after the sheep ; but the luckless beasts, one and all, were either drowned at once or dashed to pieces in the passage of the breakers. Next, the second officer, Thomas Symmers, volunteered to make the attempt. He jumped overboard with the line, strange to say, between his teeth, and nearly succeeded in

[1] *Chambers's Journal* gives the distance to the shore as two miles, but this is probably an exaggeration. Pepper puts it at half a mile, which is about what we would expect it to be from Alexander's account.

reaching land. Unfortunately, when he was within a few yards of it, a big wave caught him, and in his struggles he opened his mouth and let go the line. He might still have landed, but with great gallantry elected to return through the breakers to the wreck. He then made a second venture, which also failed; whereupon his brother George, the ship's doctor, tried in his turn, with the same result. But immediately afterwards two of the seamen, encouraged by the examples of the brothers, struck out for the shore, and, although they could not carry a line through were able to reach the beach in safety.

Hope was reviving, but the danger, on the other hand, was now more pressing. Every sea that broke carried away some more of the wreckage, so that the survivors found their last refuge slowly crumbling away beneath them. Again and again one or another of them was washed off the fo'c'sle, but by strenuous efforts and with help from the others regained it. Finding that their sodden clothing impeded them, most of them slipped it off; and since the women and children were particularly helpless under the buffeting of the waves, the seamen lashed them in the forechains.

Every effort to carry a line ashore having failed, one of the sailors, Peter Wilson by name,

a tough old stager, began with some resource to construct a raft out of pieces of wreckage secured with rope yarn. With great labour he put together something that would support about nine persons. No one at first was at all eager to volunteer for a passage in it ; especially since the Captain declared that a strong current was running and would infallibly carry it out to sea. But, as the fo'c'sle sank lower in the water, many changed their minds and competition for seats in the raft became quite brisk.

And it is at this point that we are compelled to relate the scandalous episode of Mr. Hormby, Quartermaster in the 60th Regiment. It will be remembered that by his heartiness and sociability he had become quite a favourite during the voyage, his only failing being his love of ghost stories, by the telling of which he had not only alarmed Mrs. Lock, but also curdled the blood of the more superstitious men among the crew. He was an officer, if not quite a gentleman, and it might be thought that in the hour of danger he would have behaved in a manner befitting his commission. Unfortunately, his behaviour was contrary to all that might have been expected of him. In Alexander's stilted language, 'he evinced a great want of fortitude.' In fact, he abandoned himself so completely to panic and

despair that once or twice Captain Greig was forced to remonstrate with him and to beg him to remember that he was a man and that his loud and unrestrained lamentations would add to the distress of his wife. She, poor soul, sat beside him, perfectly composed, with her baby daughter in her arms, a sight that should have shamed her husband. But the gallant Quartermaster was beyond shame, and continued to bewail his fate. As soon as the raft was ready for launching, however, his howls ceased and he pressed eagerly forward to beg the last available place in it for his wife and child ; and, when this was granted, stepped down into it himself with the intention, apparently, of giving a hand to her. Actually no such idea was in Mr. Hormby's mind that July morning. Without a word he plumped himself into the vacant seat and pushed off vigorously from the wreckage, leaving his wife and child stranded on it. Dire as was the plight of the survivors, such conduct was more than they could stomach, and the raft drifted off followed by shouts of indignation and even some prayers that it might founder before it reached the shore. One of the sailors did his best to push the Quartermaster overboard, but he was a big man and clung to it like a limpet ; and when some of the other men began to join in a general attempt to

jettison him, he was only saved by the interference of the Symmers brothers.

At the outset the raft made little progress either way ; then, as Captain Greig had predicted, the current caught it and began to carry it out to sea. Happily, it presently met with a cross-current which swept it rapidly towards a high reef over which it was hurled with great force. For a moment it was lost to view in the surf, and when it reappeared in the quieter waters beyond the breakers eight men only were observed clinging to it. The ninth, a young seaman named Bantiff, was missing and was never seen again alive. A few minutes later the raft drifted out of sight behind some rocks, but the greater peril of the passage was over.

The day wore on. In silence and without further effort, and often up to their necks in water, the remnant clung to the remains of the fo'c'sle, which now began to break up more rapidly under the battering of the waves. At one time the wreck was suddenly surrounded by sea-elephants and seals, strange beasts which added to the alarm of landsmen, ignorant that they were harmless. To Mrs. Lock, in particular, they suggested a fresh terror. For some hours she had been resigned to death by drowning, but now her old dread reasserted itself. " Oh, Lord,

Captain!" Alexander heard her exclaim. "What you think? These things eat people?" The Captain assured her that they were there from curiosity and not from hunger.

Suddenly a large part of the fo'c'sle tore loose from the bulk of the wreckage, leaving insufficient standing-room for the people who remained. A stifled shriek was heard. It was, or looked to be, the end at last. Several of the men, with a hurried farewell, jumped off and struck out for the shore. Among the first of these was a midshipman, Matthew Hore, an excellent swimmer, who reached the breakers before his companions were half way there. He sank and never reappeared. Dr. Law (well fortified, we may hope, with whisky) followed with another passenger. The former struggled through the breakers, but was in difficulties close to the shore, when some of the men who had already landed rushed in and dragged him out of the sea. His companion got in with less trouble, as did a few of the crew.

It seemed that nothing less than a miracle could save those who remained. The Captain, his son, and the more helpless of the passengers were now alone on the fo'c'sle, the planks of which were coming apart beneath their feet. Alexander, who could not swim, begged his father, who could swim a little, to take his chance

while he might. But Captain Greig resolutely refused to leave his son, or his ship, or his passengers, 'while a vestige of the wreck held together.' Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than a wave like a great wall towered above the ship and broke with a fearful impact. For some seconds wreckage and passengers were buried in the waters. Alexander and his father were clinging to the anchor stock, which was lashed to the bows, and when at last they emerged, the fo'c'sle had been driven clear over the reef on which it had lain since first the *Blenden Hall* struck, and sea after sea was sweeping it inshore. Even so, its progress was desperately slow. Its advance would be checked now and again by some reef, which would catch and hold it until the waves, as it were, retiring and re-forming, renewed their assault, tore it loose from the fangs of the rocks and hurled it shorewards once more. The wretched people who clung to the wreckage were half-drowned and savagely battered, but still they held on. There was one last and desperate struggle, with safety within a short stone's throw. The upper deck beams, wedging themselves in the sand, fought the backwash. The men who had already landed dashed to the water's edge with cheers to lend a hand. A final sea canted the fo'c'sle round,

carried it forward, and deposited it so that the passengers could scramble down on to the beach. This, we may be sure, they lost little time in doing, well-nigh dead though they were ; which was well for them, since the last man had barely reached safety when yet another big wave caught the wreckage in its backwash and drew it far out into deep water, in which it sank almost at once. The miracle had happened. How great a miracle it was we may judge from Alexander's story, which I have just given, and from two facts which he omits to mention. The first is that, in the general opinion of the castaways, the wreckage had come ashore at the only point on the coast of the island where landing was possible. The second is that this happened at five o'clock, when at that season and in that latitude the fall of night was very near. Had the wreckage been driven a little farther along the coast, or had daylight faded before the last phase, nothing could have saved this remnant of the company that sailed in the *Blenden Hall*.

CHAPTER IX

# INACCESSIBLE ISLAND

THEY were saved from drowning, and that was about all that could be said for their situation. Twelve hours before, they had been sailing serenely over a calm sea, eating, sleeping, dancing, bickering, without a thought of danger. And now they were completely destitute. Many of them were naked, having shed their clothes in their struggle with the waves. Alexander himself had not a stitch to cover him ; he had lost everything in the ship, and his entire worldly possessions consisted of his gold hunting watch, given him by his grandfather, which he had hung by a chain round his neck. The others, with the exception of the boat crews, were in much the same plight. There was no food, or water, or shelter ; the company of the *Blenden Hall* had, in fact, escaped with little but their lives, and should have counted themselves fortunate to have escaped with those. In the roll-call which was held on the shore, eighty-two passengers and crew answered their names, the only casualties being the midshipman Hore and John Bantiff,

the man who was drowned in the passage of the raft. Considering the number of helpless people carried, the loss of life was providentially small.

The gratitude of the survivors for their deliverance was soon merged in the severe discomfort they had now to face. Mrs. Lock, her children and her niece were lying helpless on the shore, overcome with fatigue and covered with cuts and bruises from the buffeting they had had on the fo'c'sle. Poor Mrs. Hormby, who had behaved with stoic fortitude in the hour of extreme peril, collapsed on reaching land ; and when her husband, safely delivered from the raft on which he had stolen her seat, hurried to greet her, slobbering his thanks to those who had stood by her, he found her in a dead faint. Some of the men were in as bad a state and were lying apparently senseless on the beach.

Captain Greig, after taking the roll-call, did his best to put heart into this depressed company. He praised the crew for their conduct, unheroic though it appears to have been ; he congratulated the passengers on their escape ; he exhorted the stronger to do what they could to help the weaker. Indeed, while a Board of Trade enquiry would certainly have put on Captain Greig most of the blame for the disaster, once it had happened he seems to have acquitted himself in the

best traditions of his Service. This is not merely the verdict of his son. Pepper is equally emphatic in the *Asiatic Journal* : ' Captain Greig's conduct from the time the ship struck deserves every praise ; particularly for his determination of continuing on the wreck to the last moment.' Urged on by him, the men who had landed from the boats, and were a little ashamed of the part they had played, shared their clothing with the others, and especially with the women and children.

Shortly before dark, rain had begun to fall ; and now, with the coming of night, a violent storm struck the island. So, to add to all their other miseries of mind and body, the Blenden Halls had a fresh soaking. Thunderclaps and the screaming of innumerable sea-fowl mingled with the roar of the waves as they wrangled with the cliffs ; and in the vivid flashes of lightning the wretchedness of the scene was disclosed.

So horrible was the night that towards morning Alexander found himself positively envying the fate of the two men who had perished. At daylight one of the seamen, named William Taylor, found him and his father sheltering by a rock and still almost destitute of clothing. During the voyage Alexander had befriended Taylor in a trifling way, with presents of tobacco and an

occasional glass of grog, in return for some leaden bullets which the man had cast for him, and for other minor services. These gifts Taylor now handsomely repaid. He had picked up on the shore a warm jacket, which he pressed upon the Captain ; and when the latter found that it would not fit him, Taylor begged Alexander to accept it. Alexander at first refused, only giving way in face of the man's genuine disappointment. Taylor then declared with tears in his eyes that he would not rest until he had found some clothes for his 'brave commander,' and went off to forage on the beach, leaving the Captain and his son deeply touched by his generosity.

It was perhaps as well for the castaways that the night was not made more wretched for them by a precise knowledge of where they were. So far they believed themselves to be on Tristan da Cunha itself, where there was already a small settlement and where passing ships very occasionally put in. Actually, as they were to discover in a few hours, they were upon Tristan's inhospitable neighbour, Inaccessible Island. This is the westernmost of the little group known as Tristan da Cunha. With its companions, Tristan itself and Nightingale Island, it is one of the loneliest spots of the habitable world. It lies in latitude 37.5° S., longitude 12.16° W., in the

middle of the South Atlantic, about two thousand miles west from the Cape of Good Hope and about four thousand miles north-east of Cape Horn. The nearest land, if we except the tiny uninhabited island of Diego Alvarez (Gough Island) about two hundred and fifty miles S.S.E., is St. Helena, some fifteen hundred miles N.N.E. of the group. It is, in short, a solitude complete enough to satisfy the most unsocial.

The Tristan group is volcanic. Its base is the submarine ridge which runs down the centre of the Atlantic, rising in peaks above the level of the sea at the Azores, Ascension Island and St. Paul's Rocks. It may therefore be counted as part of the legendary continent of Atlantis, on the existence of which I hesitate to give an opinion. While the average depth of this submarine elevation is from sixteen hundred to seventeen hundred fathoms, on either side of it the bottom drops to three thousand, and between the islands of the Tristan group a depth of over a thousand fathoms is found. The fact is important, since, by making anchorage impossible, it partly explains the catastrophe to the *Blenden Hall*.

The group was discovered in 1506 by the Portuguese admiral Tristan or Tristão da Cunha, who did nothing with it beyond giving it his

name. For more than two hundred and eighty years the islands, on the road to nowhere in particular, remained untenanted and almost unvisited, until in 1790 John Patten, an English merchant captain, spent eight months on Tristan with his crew, who busied themselves with the slaughter of a vast number of seals. The first genuine settler was one Thomas Currie, who landed in 1810 ; but in the same year his solitude was broken by an American from Salem named Lambert, who rechristened the group The Islands of Refreshment, annexed them, Thomas Currie and all, and declared himself their sole sovereign and possessor. Two years afterwards, however, the monarch and his companion Williams were drowned while out fishing ; and a little later Currie was joined by two other men. The principal occupations of these colonists were the growing of wheat, oats and vegetables, the breeding of pigs, and the entertainment of the American whalers which from time to time put in for water and supplies. In 1812, when war broke out between Britain and the United States, the islands emerged into a brief notoriety. They were used as a base by the American cruisers and privateers which were preying on British shipping, and it was this circumstance, perhaps, which led the British

Government in 1816 to annex the islands and instal a small garrison. When the garrison was withdrawn, a corporal in the Royal Artillery named William Glass stayed behind with his wife and two children and a couple of masons.

Glass, therefore, may be regarded as the father of the colony. He lived there until his death in 1853, by which time the population had considerably increased. Additional settlers would arrive in one way or another, or shipwrecked sailors would elect to stay behind when their comrades were taken off ; in 1827 some coloured women from St. Helena emigrated to Tristan to provide brides for Glass's bachelors ; and later some more coloured women were introduced for the same purpose from the Cape. On the other hand, there were periodical secessions ; as in 1856, when a quarter of the population removed to the United States, and in the following year, when more than half the remainder went to Cape Colony. But the settlement was never entirely extinguished. After Glass's death an old man-of-war's man named Cotton became head of the community ; and from him in course of time the succession passed to Peter Green, a native of Amsterdam.

The little colony had its full share of troubles. During the American Civil War, Confederate

cruisers almost swept the whalers off the seas. In 1885, fifteen out of the nineteen men on Tristan were drowned while taking out provisions to a ship in the offing. Almost as serious a calamity was the plague of rats from a wrecked vessel. These multiplied with amazing rapidity, overran the island and destroyed the crops. In 1908, when Raymond du Baty visited Tristan in his famous ketch, he found the rats as numerous as ever ; they were as large as young rabbits, as daring as foxes, and as destructive as locusts.[1] In 1906 the potato crop failed and most of the cattle died. More than once, in fact, the inhabitants have been reduced to such straits that the British Government has offered to remove them in a body to the Cape ; but while from time to time a few of the younger men and women have gone, a residue has always stayed, and in 1930 the population numbered a hundred and fifty-seven. They are an extremely mixed race, have neither constitution nor laws, and seem to manage very well without them. There is no drink. There is no crime. The men are daring seamen and excellent carpenters, simple, hospitable, industrious and healthy. They live for the most part in stone cottages, and have a church and an Anglican chaplain.

[1] Du Baty : *Fifteen Thousand Miles in a Ketch.*

Shortly after the Great War the Colonial Office again proposed to transfer the settlers to South Africa ; but again they refused, and lately there has been talk of an important concession for working the valuable guano deposits, on terms which would secure the future safety and well-being of the inhabitants. It is possible, however, that modern enterprise will not prove an unmixed blessing to so simple and attractive a community.

Tristan itself, where in 1821 Corporal Glass was at the beginning of his long reign, is a circular island with an area of sixteen square miles. On all sides, except the north-west, precipitous cliffs rise sheer from the ocean, and in the centre of the island is a volcanic cone, 7,640 feet in height and usually capped with snow.

Inaccessible Island is about twenty miles distant from Tristan. It is much smaller, with an area of about four square miles, and has only once been inhabited (of choice)—in 1871, when two Germans, brothers of the name of Stoltenhoff, came across from Tristan. They stayed there until 1873, when they were taken off by the *Challenger*.[1]

In this desolate and unhelpful spot the company from the *Blenden Hall* found itself on the morning

[1] The ship, commissioned by the Royal Society, which made a famous cruise of oceanic exploration 1872–1876.

INACCESSIBLE ISLAND

*From 'The Lonely Island' by R. A. Rogers*
*(George Allen & Unwin Ltd.)*

*facing page* 98

PUTNEY.

of July 24th. During the previous evening, fearing lest the waves should reach them, they had dragged themselves up among the rocks above the shore, but during the night, so steep and slippery was the slope, most of them had dropped back on to the beach, where morning found them, wet, muddy, hungry, bruised and miserable.

The first and most obvious necessity was food, in search of which the Captain, Alexander, Symmers (the second officer) and Captain Miles (an assistant surgeon) undertook at daylight a short tour of exploration. It was a painful and disappointing business, as after clambering barefoot for half a mile or so over the sharp boulders they discovered nothing except an object which at first they took to be a hut, but which proved at shorter range to be merely another rock. There was no trace of any inhabitants, or of any vegetation. Overhead towered a barren mountain, swathed in clouds ; all around them were rocks, and among these, in incredible quantities and as tame as house cats, were the most important of the population of Inaccessible Island—the penguins ; and, attending them, a variety of other birds, of which the most numerous was a species of thrush. Captain Miles, after regarding these birds with a thoughtful eye, declared

himself exceedingly hungry, knocked one of them down, and 'in a most voracious manner' devoured it raw. Alexander, who had not yet sloughed off the niceties of civilised life, was rather horrified by the spectacle, but confesses that in a very short time he found himself following the doctor's example.

Something better, however, than raw thrush was awaiting the explorers on their return. During the night the poor *Blenden Hall* had been coming ashore in instalments; to such purpose that the beach was already littered with fragments of wreckage, casks, cases, bales of goods and so forth. And among the very first of these objects to reach land was nothing less than a case of

HIBBERT'S CELEBRATED BOTTLED PORTER.

We can picture the alacrity with which it was dragged out of reach of the waves, and the enthusiasm with which, when it was broken open, several intact bottles were discovered and broached. Such is the magic of porter on an empty stomach that in a very little while quite a rosy view was being taken of the situation. It seemed that, after all, there was something to be said for desert islands. A wing of thrush, a bottle of porter, and what more could a man ask?

Captain Miles, indeed, became positively hilarious and insisted on the party drinking the health of Mr. Hibbert and his family, who had provided such timely refreshment ; Alexander remarking that, although he did not know it, he himself was included prospectively in the toast, since on a later and happier day he married a Miss Hibbert. But he does not tell us whether it was the lady's charms that brought him to the altar in her company, or if it was that her name conjured up an irresistibly pleasant memory.

Just at the moment matrimony was far from the thoughts of any of the Blenden Halls. When the first exhilarating flush of Mr. Hibbert's porter had faded, the stern needs of shipwrecked folk reasserted themselves—food, water, shelter, escape ; and the greatest of these was food. Once more a small party started off along the shore, and, on reaching the spot where they had seen the hut which was only a rock, they found that in their absence a stranger had arrived. This was ' an immense animal, nearly twenty feet in length, lying among the rocks.' No one knew what it was, or if it attacked people, or if it ate them, or if it could be eaten by them. It was lucky that Mrs. Lock was not of the party, or she would at once have jumped to an alarming conclusion. The explorers, more curious than

the lady, took cover and watched ; and presently, 'observing that it was destitute of feet' and therefore was unlikely to be able to chase them very closely over the rocks, began to throw stones at it. The animal, of course, was a sea-elephant, the mildest of monsters. When molested in this fashion, it retired clumsily into the sea, on reaching which it turned round and blew up quantities of water through its short trunk, doubtless in indignation at so unprovoked and unexpected an assault.

On venturing a little farther along the shore, the explorers met with numbers of seals. They also made acquaintance with what can only be described as the Inaccessible Island smell, with which in the following weeks they were to become unpleasantly familiar. It was not at all a nice smell, since it proceeded from countless bodies of dead seals ; and if a live seal is hardly the most sweet-scented of beasts, a dead seal is quite one of the most malodorous. The explorers now returned. They had not discovered much, but at least it seemed that the food problem would not become acute in the near future. There were the birds, as easily caught as farmyard fowls, and there were—unappetising though the thought must have been—the seals.

As the party neared the spot where it had left

the main body, it had its second surprise. Advancing towards it was what appeared to be a squad of soldiers in full regimentals. But just as the hut had proved to be a rock, and the monster a sea-elephant, so the soldiers on closer inspection revealed themselves as merely shipmates. They were clothed, it is true, from head to foot in scarlet, and were wearing turbans of white muslin ; but although at a glance it might have seemed that Inaccessible Island, which had already provided a case of porter, had also produced the beginnings of a carnival, the truth was more prosaic. During the absence of the explorers two bales of red cloth and one bale of white muslin had been washed ashore, and with the help of these the Blenden Halls had hurriedly clothed themselves. Alexander and his companions, now finding themselves the only half naked human inhabitants of the island, lost no time in following their example.

Water was the next concern, soon liquidated by a large stream which came down the mountain out of the clouds, and which, although fouled and muddied by the swarms of penguins, was still drinkable.

The Captain now ordered a second general muster, at which he urged the company on to fresh activity : to make tents for the women with

the rest of the red cloth, if possible to light a fire, and, above all, to watch the beach for further treasures from the wreck.

The camp was formed on a muddy little plateau above the shore, and there, with the aid of some long bamboo poles that fortunately had been carried to land, a few makeshift bivouacs were rigged up. They gave shelter of a sort from the rain that all this time had been pouring down, and that was about as much as could be said for them. Alexander's tent only stood the stress of the weather for an hour or two before it collapsed on him, a heap of gaudy sodden cloth. And by that time he was too weary and discouraged to make the effort of pitching it afresh.

In this fashion the first and worst day on Inaccessible passed. The officers were busy keeping their men to the task of retrieving stuff from the beach and of making the encampment a little more habitable. Most of the men, on their side, apparently asked for nothing better than a quiet death. They were content to lie, stretched like corpses on the muddy shore in the drizzling rain, until oblivion released them. They had lost all hope and all courage, save when a chance of salvaging liquor offered itself, when they woke to life marvellously enough. Alexander tells us how the appearance of his father alarmed him.

Forty-eight hours earlier he had been a sailor in vigorous middle age, stepping the quarterdeck of his own ship. A day on Inaccessible Island had turned him into an old man. Alexander observed too that the women bore their hard fate more stoically than did the men. Passing the flimsy shelter which had been erected for them, he saw Miss Morton, that niece of Mrs. Lock's for whom such matrimonial schemes had been hatched, sitting at the entrance nursing one of her young cousins as calmly 'as if she had been in her drawing-room.' He stopped, shook hands with her, and mumbled some unconvincing words of encouragement. But Miss Morton needed no comforting. She replied that she was quite happy and unafraid, only a little surprised to see so many 'great hulking men giving way to despair when they might have been making themselves useful.'

CHAPTER X

# SETTLING IN

So here we have our Blenden Halls—eighty-two men, women and children—compactly if not cosily established on their desert island for a period that must have seemed to them quite indefinite, and might well have run into years. How will they fit themselves into this new life, adapt themselves to these strange circumstances, adjust themselves socially? How would eighty-two men, women and children picked at random from the middle and lower classes to-day conduct themselves in a like plight? That is the interesting point.

If we are to start with the second day on the island, our answer to these questions for the Blenden Halls must be 'Badly.' An awful night came on. The rain poured down in torrents. The wind blew great guns. By daylight not a tent remained standing save the one that had been put up for the women and children. Even the single cheerful event had an alarming sequel. Alexander describes it graphically in the captions with which he heads this chapter: '*A Cask*

*of Spirits found—Its Exhilarating Properties—Its Baneful Consequences.*' Shortly before darkness fell, word reached the little plateau that a cask of Hollands had come to land. Captain Greig at once sent Symmers down to the beach to post a guard round it and dole out a ration. But the guard was too late and the ration was anticipated. When Symmers reached the beach he found that the Hollands had worked the miracle which the objurgations of the officers had failed to effect, and that men who all day had been stretched on the ground were suddenly restored to life. Enough of the liquor fortunately remained to put fresh heart into the passengers on the plateau and to leave a supply for emergencies. But a new danger now appeared. The sailors, who before had been uselessly inert, became dangerously obstreperous. They staggered about the beach abusing and insulting every passenger they met, so that for a time an outright mutiny, or at least an affray, seemed likely to be added to the horrors of the night. Fortunately most of the men were too drunk to go further than words, and just sober enough to pay a little attention to the Captain ; and order of a sort was eventually re-established.

Hardly, however, had everyone settled down again for the night when word of a new trove

was brought. This time it was a hogshead of rum. Symmers at once returned to the beach, accompanied by Alexander. But once more they were mortified to find that they were too late. Someone else had reached the spot first, this being an old seaman named John Dulliver, who had stove in one end of the cask, filled himself up with rum, and poured away what he did not want. He had then crawled into the cask and fallen fast asleep, the snuggest man on the island, but a disappointing sight for people who had come down in the rain and wind expecting to find rum and finding instead a drunken and snoring old sailor.

Dulliver's enterprise, however, gave Alexander an idea. He found a large water-cask on the shore, and, with the assistance of a comparatively sober hand, rolled it up on to the plateau. He also found nearly half a cheese, practically undamaged. He and his father crawled into the cask and ate the cheese, and spent a night of shivering discomfort, a little better off—and that was all—than the others who had neither food nor shelter.

The *Blenden Hall* was wrecked on Monday, July 23rd. The bad weather continued all Tuesday and Wednesday, though moderating a little towards Wednesday evening, and on Thursday

again until about mid-day. Nothing much could be done in such a relentless downpour, but from time to time fresh articles came ashore, and there was a certain gloomy excitement in the discovery and accumulation of flotsam. The beach was a lucky dip in which the normal values were reversed, the humblest objects being often the most prized. The finds included the carcases of a cow and two sheep, some pieces of pork, some kegs of claret and spirits, a number of bolts of canvas, and—most providentially—a case of surgical instruments and a Congreve rocket. These last were the most welcome arrivals, since they enabled a fire to be lighted, a feat which so far had baffled every effort, and a meal to be cooked for people who for some days had been living on raw food.

Dr. McLennan was singled out among the passengers for a piece of good fortune in the arrival ashore of one of his trunks unopened. It contained four or five dozen shirts of the finest quality, as well as other useful articles. The doctor promptly removed the lid and gave a couple of the shirts to each of the passengers. He then secured the box and left it under a rock ; but his generosity was ill repaid, for the next day the box and all its contents were missing. Although Captain Greig made every effort to

recover the stolen property, in the general distraction it was impossible to find the culprit. But if the doctor lost his box, each of his fellow-passengers was the better off by a pair of excellent shirts.

Things, in fact, were at last looking up ; to such purpose that many who had been lamenting their survival from the wreck began to change their minds. Friday was the first fine day. They had food, water and a fire ; and if until now they had been living, like Diogenes, in tubs, there were better prospects for the future in the wreckage which continued to pile up on the shore. Moreover, while they had neither the ingenuity nor the miraculous resources of the Swiss Family Robinson, the Blenden Halls had made the first discovery of the castaway—that he must use his wits and fend for himself if he is to keep alive. So they began to improvise. An iron buoy served as a rough cooking-pot, frying-pans were constructed out of tin linings stripped from cases, while the iron hoop of a water-cask was bent into a gridiron.

But the reaction did not last long. It ended, in fact, as soon as the rain began again on Friday evening. By nightfall most of the sailors had drunk themselves out of their senses, while the passengers sat huddled round the fire, which had

been built up to a prodigious size with spars and tar-barrels. Alexander describes the scene and its discomforts quite graphically :

'The passengers and sailors were sitting indiscriminately around ; the latter, mad with liquor, were quarrelling and nearly murdering one another, and at length they commenced grossly insulting their more helpless shipmates, particularly the passengers ; swearing, with the most horrid imprecations, that they would kill and eat the children when next in want of food. The screams and terror of the females were dreadful in the extreme. The Captain several times addressed them [the crew], yet but little attention was paid to his commands ; till at last, one man aiming a blow at Lieutenant Painter, my father, with the stave of a cask which he seized from amidst the burning embers, brought this ruffian—one of the worst—to the ground, calling at the same time upon his officers to assist in driving these wretches off ; declaring that they were composed of the vilest cowards, and asking if they could single out one man among the lot who had evinced any courage on the wreck. This had the desired effect ; several of the passengers declared they would rather die on the spot than submit to further annoyance ; and the sailors, evidently intimidated, promised to molest them no more. But during the confusion they

had contrived to rob the passengers of their cloth by piecemeal, till finally many who stood cowering round the flames had scarcely a rag to cover them.'

It was a discouraging spectacle, as surveyed by Alexander, sitting dismally aloof on a low rock. His chief concern was for his father, sunk in gloomy thought, the firelight flickering over his haggard face and his beard, now snowy white ; he had the air of a man who had reached the end of his endurance. Next to him sat Dr. Law, who seemed to have shrunk into a skeleton and by repeated doses of Hollands had tippled himself into a stupor. On the other side of the Captain were Mrs. Lock and her family. The former was a deplorable object. The waves and rocks had sadly mishandled her ; her legs had been cut almost to the bone and, for lack of proper remedies, the sores were beginning to fester ; while her long, jet black hair, falling in a tangled shock over her face and shoulders to her waist, gave her an appearance that was hardly human. Miss Morton was the most unmoved of the whole company. She had made it her task to look after the children, even singing to them to keep them amused ; with such success that ' the poor little innocents, though much reduced, looked

perfectly happy and contented.' Next were the Painters, the sorriest honeymoon couple in the world, emaciated, wretched, and at the point, it seemed, of succumbing under their sufferings. The Hormbys were in the same plight, with domestic infelicity added ; for while the Quartermaster made a great show of his solicitude for his wife's comfort, she for her part could not forget his base desertion of her on the wreck. " Oh, Hormby," she was heard to repeat at intervals throughout the evening, " if you did not want to save me, why did you not try to save our child ? "

As the night wore on and the rain continued, one by one the poor wretches dragged themselves from the fire to the shelter of those miserable casks, in which, like dogs in their kennels, they found their homes. It was a choice of discomforts. The fire gave warmth, but no protection from the rain ; the casks were chilly, but by comparison dry, and therefore offered a better chance of sleep.

At last only Alexander was left. The night was very still, save for the steady beat of the rain, the occasional shrill scream of an albatross, and the distant roll of the waves against the shore. His thoughts were melancholy enough, but, as he sat in reverie, a hand smote him on the shoulder

and, turning, he saw Symmers. That stout-hearted fellow was in undiminished spirits. He rallied Alexander on his gloom, sat down beside him and, filling a small tin mug from a bottle he held, ordered the boy to toss it off. It was excellent vintage port, the very antidote for Alexander's complaint, and so fired him that he started off to find some better shelter than the leaky cask in which he had made shift during the last two days.

For once his luck was in. He had not wandered far before, to his intense surprise, he stumbled into a veritable tent. Scarcely able to believe his eyes, he lifted a flap of the canvas, and, looking inside, saw, snugly established under a small hanging lamp, the familiar figure of Peter Wilson, the same old sailor who had put together the raft when the *Blenden Hall* began to break up. How Peter had got his tent or his lamp, and pitched the first or lit the second, Alexander neither knew nor asked. The thing was a miracle, but it was there. Peter, I repeat, was an old sailor ; and old sailors, like old soldiers, have ways and means of their own. What was to the point was that Peter at once declared that he had put up this tent with the express intention of inviting the Captain and his son to share its shelter with him. Alexander did not believe a

word of this, but without staying to argue hurried off to fetch his father. The Captain, however, was at first very reluctant to move. Peter had behaved well on the wreck ; he might be behaving well now ; unfortunately, since landing, he had been one of the most drunken and troublesome of a drunken and troublesome crowd, and the Captain was unwilling to countenance his conduct by accepting a favour from him. Nevertheless, Alexander's entreaties and the discomforts of the night at last prevailed over his scruples, and father and son packed up their possessions—Alexander's consisted of his gold watch and four pieces of cloth—and set off to shift their quarters. Peter met them half-way, relieved the Captain of his burden, and offered the humblest of apologies for his late misdemeanours, which he attributed, quite correctly, to an undue indulgence in salvaged liquor.

This was all very well, but presently the real motive behind this change of heart appeared. The Greigs had not been long established in their tent when they were visited by a truculent party of sailors. It seemed that Peter in his cups had quarrelled and fought so freely with his mates that they had driven him from their company, vowing that they would pull his tent down during the night. Peter had accordingly given hostages

to fortune, so that when his enemies put in an appearance he was able to jump up and shout, "Avast there! This is the Captain's tent; I built it for him."

His manœuvre was completely successful. The English retain a pathetic respect for any leader who has thoroughly let them down; and the men of the *Blenden Hall*, though far from sober, at once professed the greatest regard and affection for their Captain. They gave him three bibulous cheers and withdrew into the night, leaving Peter in gleeful possession of his tent.

Nevertheless, as the night wore on, fresh visitors began to arrive. Peter's palace was too outstanding an object in the surrounding desolation to escape attention, and from time to time such a cry was heard as, "Greig, for God's sake give me shelter, or I must perish!" And shelter could hardly be denied. Some of the passengers, half-clothed, more than half-starved, and almost naked, had been in the open for four nights, and had not even been able to secure casks. They were admitted, and soon the tent became uncomfortably crowded.

In the face of this invasion Peter's manners deteriorated and he forgot his promises of amendment. He had invited the Captain and his son in the spirit of a man who takes out an

insurance policy, but he had not bargained on being almost crowded out of his own tent by a lot of wet, clamorous people. He roundly abused the newcomers, and as he had a private stock of liquor to which he helped himself generously, his language became more lurid with every potation. Among his uninvited guests was the ship's steward, who stood up to his bullying. "Hullo, Peter Wilson Esquire," he said; "now you've got your foot in the stirrup you seem determined to ride the high horse." The 'Esquire' stuck, to become Peter's nickname on Inaccessible Island.

There was not much sleep for anyone in the tent that night. One by one they dropped off, but all—and especially the Captain—woke at intervals and complained of nightmare. Possibly a diet of raw penguin and neat Hollands had not agreed with them.

Happily the next day the rain stopped and the sun shone and courage revived. The English have two peculiarities which assert themselves under the most discouraging circumstances. The first is a love of public meetings, the second a propensity for forming parties. We must not be surprised to find, therefore, that directly climatic conditions changed for the better, another general muster of all the Blenden Halls was held;

and that at once two hostile parties took the field. On one side were ranged the passengers, on the other the crew. The former temporarily sank their mutual differences in order to attack the conduct of the sailors. Ever since the wreck, they complained, some of the men had been drunk and abusive, others had been drunk and torpid, and the rest had been first the one and then the other. Not one of them had lifted a hand to mitigate the sufferings of the ladies or to improve the general situation.

When the passengers had had their say it was the turn of the crew, who had plenty of grievances of their own. They were not going to be ordered about by cravens like Hormby, or upstarts like the Painters, or coloured people like Mrs. Lock. "Sailors don't like to be called servants," explained their spokesman, "and that too by people like them. But set a beggar on horseback and he'll ride to the Devil. My family," he added, "live in the same town with Mrs. Painter and are quite as respectable."

At this point the Captain, who was chairman of the meeting, intervened to stop the recriminations. He declared his intention of protecting the rights and the feelings of both parties, while reminding them that, after all, these trifling disputes were of no great consequence, since in a

few days they would all probably be dead of starvation. This being so, they might just as well meet their fate amicably. This advice was so sensible that the disputants dropped their wrangling and the debate was adjourned, without having achieved much more than to enable a number of people to air their grievances. The men—sailors and passengers alike—were then divided into three parties, the first to forage for provisions and watch for salvage, the second to collect fuel, and the third to explore the island.

Alexander was with the first party. He had very little fortune, returning with some stray pieces of pork and no more. Some of the others, however, were more successful, quite a good store of pork and ham being collected. Unfortunately, when this was distributed, there was another regrettable incident, for which Hormby was responsible. Having his own ideas of the ration to which he was entitled, he fought his way into the centre of the group where a youth was doling out the meat, and beat him on the head with his stick. Riot flamed up at once, and the boatswain was about to give Hormby a dose of his own medicine when the gallant Quartermaster beat a hasty retreat.

The fuel party brought back an ample supply of wood to keep up the communal fire on which

so much depended, but the explorers returned greatly disheartened. They had climbed with considerable difficulty to the top of the mountain behind the encampment, only to find themselves in a thick fog. They could see nothing, and came back no wiser than when they started ; moreover, during the descent they lost their way in the fog and did not reach the camp until after dark, when the fire guided them to it like a beacon.

The day ended with discouragement and a serious mishap. A leak was found in the cask of Hollands, and before it was stopped a great deal of the precious liquid was lost. This, however, was not an unmixed disaster. In those early days the liquor question was the most difficult of all. Great as was the need to hoard as much as could be rescued from the waves, the crew were shameless in appropriating whatever came ashore and in forming private stocks. In fact, by a reversal of the usual process, the Socialists of Inaccessible Island were the officers and passengers, the Individualists were the crew ; and so long as the salvage lasted, the Individualists had the best of it. That evening, for instance, the bottled ale began to come ashore, and although this was a less dangerous liquor than Hollands, it increased the demoralisation of

the sailors. Some of them left the camp altogether, swearing that in future they would fend for themselves ; while others made a set at Mrs. Lock, whose tactless language had made her especially unpopular with the crew, and, knowing this lady's little weakness, frightened her nearly out of her senses by threatening to 'eat her children.'

For the moment so drastic a step was unnecessary, for the penguins, though unpalatable, abounded and were easily knocked over.

'Made some soup with penguins and wild celery,' wrote Pepper in the *Asiatic Journal*, 'and found considerable nourishment therefrom, notwithstanding it was very mawkish.'

The island contained several large rookeries at which the penguins arrived in the proper season to lay their eggs. The rookeries were like miniature cities, with alleys and lanes that led nowhere, and nests and more nests, so thickly clustered that it was almost impossible for a man to make his way through them without trampling on the inhabitants. The naturalists from the *Challenger*, visiting the island half a century later, described the rookeries in some detail.[1] The stench of them, they reported, was overpowering, while the screaming of the disturbed birds was

[1] H. N. Moseley : *Notes by a Naturalist in the 'Challenger.*

' perfectly terrifying.' The penguins did not move from their nests on the approach of an intruder, but pecked fiercely at his legs as he passed ; so that before paying them a visit, it was essential to be provided with thick boots and a stout stick.

The hungry Blenden Halls, therefore, had no difficulty in catching their penguins, although it was a hard and disgusting business to despatch them. The first time Alexander attempted to kill one of these birds for the pot, he had a disconcerting experience. Holding it by the neck, he tried to hack off its head with a knife ; and, when this proved too blunt for the work, he changed his tactics, ripped the bird open and disembowelled it. Whereupon, to his astonishment, the penguin, deprived of its entrails, jumped up and pecked him. This gruesome incident haunted his dreams for several nights.

On the following day the exploring party again set out to climb to the top of the mountain. Alexander stayed behind and started to write his journal. He had picked up a portion of a writing-desk, in which he had found pens and some old copies of *The Times*. He concocted his ink out of the blood of penguins, and wrote on the margins of the newspapers the notes from which he was afterwards able to compile his book.

While distress and privation drove Alexander

A PENGUIN ROOKERY
On Tristan da Cunha

*From 'Three Years in Tristan da Cunha' by K. M. Barrow (Skeffington & Son Ltd.)*

*facing page* 122

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PUSNEY.

for a distraction to literature, he observed the curiously diverse effect they were having upon the others. The Symmers brothers, quiet, unpretentious fellows, neither of whom had cut much of a figure aboard ship, were now the mainstay of the company, energetic, resourceful and unselfish. On the other hand, Scrymgeour, the chief officer, and Hawkesley, the third officer, who might have been expected to act in a manner befitting their rank, withdrew jealously to a separate mess, and refused to share anything with anybody. Hormby behaved even worse; for Alexander heard him refuse a glass of port out of his private store when the Doctor begged some for a patient in a critical state. Mrs. Lock, by contrast, was ready to divide her last meal with anybody, even with Mrs. Painter after one of their periodical disputes. Yet, generous though she was, her pugnacity and want of tact gave perpetual trouble. Her manners with the crew continued to be deplorable. "You sailor," Alexander overheard her saying to one of the men, "why you no wait on lady? You ought to wait on officer's lady. You a common sailor. Why not then wait?" We can hardly blame the 'common sailor' if he refused to 'wait' with forcible language.

Some of the other passengers took a similar

line, though less offensively, with the result that feeling among the men soon ran very high. By the law of the day the wreck of their ship released them from discipline, leaving the Captain with no authority to give commands or to inflict punishments.[1] Accordingly, they met the orders of the Locks and the Painters with surly refusals and such remarks as, "The Island Inaccessible carries no passengers"; and, when the orders continued, with insults and even with blows. The passengers then changed their tone and offered large sums of money for help and food[2]; but money had no value on Inaccessible Island, and in any case the men were so roused that they were ready to murder any shipmate who took a bribe. Between these two parties poor Captain Greig had a very rough time. He would explain to the men that the orders of which they complained were the result of ignorance and not of an intention to offend; he would threaten to withdraw his protection from Mrs. Lock if she persisted in insulting the sailors; but the sailors stubbornly withheld their help from the

[1] This was an anomalous state of affairs which more than once led to trouble. In 1740, when the *Wager* was wrecked off the south-west point of South America, all authority collapsed and the men ignored or defied the commands of Captain Cheap. It was an old tradition that when a ship was lost, discipline, never so necessary as at such a moment, disappeared with it.

[2] Pepper, in the *Asiatic Journal*, says that £8 to £10 a month was offered to the men for their help in getting food.

passengers, while Mrs. Lock in half an hour would forget any promise of amendment she might have made.

About midnight the exploring party returned. This time they had had better luck, returning with a mixed bag of good news and bad. They had reached the top of the mountain, and, the day being fine and clear, had obtained an excellent view. The last lingering doubt of the whereabouts of the Blenden Halls was dispelled. Twenty miles to the north-east the snow-capped peak of Tristan rose out of the sea to a height of nearly 8,000 feet ; ten miles to the south-east were the low cliffs and twin hills of Nightingale Island.[1] It was plain beyond further debate that the Blenden Halls were lodged on Inaccessible Island, so named from the difficulty of landing on it in any except the calmest weather. The prospect was not promising. They were at the beginning of the stormy season, and, even if their situation should be discovered, it seemed to the pessimists among them unlikely that they could be taken off before the summer months. Moreover, the explorers had seen no living thing except a few albatross and the sea-elephants and birds on the shore, and no vegetation except rank rushes and

[1] The party under-estimated these distances, reporting Tristan fifteen miles off and Nightingale Island only five.

some patches of wild celery. In 1873, when the *Challenger* paid its visit, there were pig running wild about the mountain, but in 1822 they had not yet been introduced. Worse still was the possibility, later realised, that the sea-elephants and birds might migrate from the island in a night ; and when the celery had all been picked, and the salvaged stores had been finished, starvation was certain. In this respect, therefore, the explorers returned with no good tidings, although they brought with them a welcome supply of celery. One small discovery they had made which gave a gleam of hope. They had found a whaler's knife and the blade of a steering oar on the shore, from which it was argued that the island had been visited before and recently, and so might be visited again and soon. And that was all the comfort to be got out of their expedition.

CHAPTER XI

## UPS AND DOWNS

The Blenden Halls may now be said to have settled in, so far as it was possible for anybody to settle in such a spot as Inaccessible Island. They continued to retrieve treasures from the shore, although the supply of liquor dwindled and soon ceased, much to the relief of Captain Greig and the passengers, since the sailors, being the more skilled and assiduous salvagers, got the bulk of it, to the detriment of the island's peace. By contrast, a Bible and Prayer Book arrived out of the sea and, Sunday coming round, the Captain held a service at which he requested the attendance of everybody. It was held on a high rock on which a flagstaff, carrying the ship's burgee, union downwards as a signal of distress, had been set up to attract passing vessels ; and the prayers, the reading from the Bible, and the short address given by the Captain were so affecting that most of the congregation were moved to tears. Everyone, particularly the crew, made promises of good conduct which, in the absence of liquor, there was some prospect of their keeping.

After the service, Alexander went for a solitary ramble along the shore. He was caught in a thunderstorm, drenched to the skin, and on the point of returning to the camp when he saw a large case, just washed up by the waves. He pulled it in, opened it, and found that it contained three dozen of excellent claret. This, in the new epoch of involuntary Prohibition, was a marvellous prize. Alexander at once forgot his recent gratitude for the dryness of the island and, instead of consigning the case to the sea once more, as doubtless he should have done, he behaved as most of us would in his circumstances. After all, in deploring drink, he had merely meant to deplore it in the hands of others ; which is the point of view of a good many people. Nevertheless, perhaps for his punishment, he had barely drained a bottle when he ran a long nail into his foot, which gave him such exquisite pain that he nearly fainted. He left the claret where it lay and limped home to the Doctor, who in default of other remedies ordered him a poultice of wild celery. Alexander crawled over to the fire to make his poultice, and there found Edward Hurry, the ship's steward. This man had been engaged about four years previously, when in such poverty that he was begging in the streets of London. He had accosted the Captain and

produced a written character, explaining that he had been a steward but had been robbed of all his clothes, so that he was in no state to take a berth ; and the Captain had then fitted him out and given him a job in his ship. During his first voyage Hurry had amassed in presents and perquisites no less than £250, a sum which gives an idea of the scale of tips in an East Indiaman. This was his second voyage, and until the shipwreck, with an eye for favours to come, he had shown himself most solicitous for the comfort of the passengers. Alexander might reasonably expect this man, who owed all his past prosperity to Captain Greig, to show a little present gratitude, and therefore asked him to prepare the poultice. To which that most obsequious of stewards replied, " The ship Inaccessible carries no passengers and I'm not going to fag for anybody." His manner was so insolent that Symmers, who was cooking something over the fire, completely lost his temper and threw the pot, contents and all, at Hurry's head, bidding him begone from his sight if he did not want to be roughly handled. Symmers then played the good Samaritan and made Alexander a poultice which greatly eased his pain.

Monday, July 30th, was remarkable for the discovery of the ship's cutter, lying high and dry

and almost undamaged behind a ridge of rocks. This, it will be recalled, had been launched to bring the ship's head round when the breakers were sighted. The cable had then been cut and the boat had vanished amid imprecations into the mist. The cutter's crew, to justify their conduct, had produced a plausible tale about being carried off among the breakers and thrown out of the boat, which they declared had then been dashed to pieces on the rocks. They were now proved liars. Actually they had drawn as near to the shore as they dared and then recklessly abandoned the cutter and waded through the surf. In the general delight at the discovery of the boat their behaviour escaped the censure it deserved. The carpenter, after a careful inspection, pronounced the cutter perfectly sound, save for a trifling hole which he patched with a strip of hide from the carcase of a cow. Optimism now prevailed, the Blenden Halls assuring each other that directly a ship appeared, an event which in their new mood they seemed to think might happen almost any day, they would launch the cutter and row out to her. The problem of getting through the surf remained ; but it was now the prevailing opinion that on a calm day —which they must trust Providence to supply— the cutter could be manhandled into the smoother

water beyond the reefs ; and since it had come ashore unscathed, there was no reason why it should not make the return passage. This new hope had a swift reaction on the castaways. The sailors at once became more respectful. The passengers at once became extravagantly elated. Hormby went round offering explanations and apologies to anyone he could find to listen to him. Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter indulged in a violent quarrel.

This last encounter was a most scandalous affair. It took place just as everybody was retiring for the night, and such was the uproar that most of the colony hurried to the spot under the impression that someone was being murdered. From words the two ladies had almost got to blows. Painter himself, shouting with laughter, was trying to drag his better half back into her tent, while some of the more stalwart passengers struggled with Mrs. Lock. The scene ended with the arrival of the Captain, who was heard to ejaculate, " Thank God we have no respectable females with us ! " He then gave the brawlers a lecture on deportment, neither his first nor his last, concluding by telling them that they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Their brawls, however, continued, until at last the Captain insisted on putting up a tent for Mrs. Lock at least a

quarter of a mile from Mrs. Painter's ; but such was their perversity that even then they were never happy out of each other's company and seldom peaceful when in it.

Though the recovery of the cutter put a better complexion on the affairs of the Blenden Halls, the question of food now threatened to become acute. The staple diet of Inaccessible Island was penguin, the flesh of which, though black, rancid, and fishy, was quite edible. It was served with celery and was varied by an occasional meal off albatross fried in oil. The sea-elephants were altogether too oily for the digestions of the majority, but the tongue, liver and brains were titbits in great demand. Unfortunately, the penguins were beginning to migrate at such a pace that there was every prospect that in a very short time none would be left on the island, and with their departure the worst pinch would be felt.

It is true that the Blenden Halls were now better off for clothes than they had been. An abundance of cloth had been washed ashore. This was cut to size with surgical instruments and roughly sewn with unravelled canvas threads. The most fashionable turn-out consisted of a red cloth cap, with a long top which hung over the shoulder, a red shirt 'like a Guernsey frock,' and canvas trousers. The general effect

must have been distinctly piratical. There was scarcely a sound pair of boots on the island, a deficiency most inconvenient in a place where to go anywhere or to get anything it was necessary to scramble over sharp rocks. Moccasins, however, were made out of the skins of sea-elephants and served as a tolerable makeshift.

The health of the castaways was as good as could be expected. Many of them had been badly cut about on the wreck, and for want of attention the wounds had festered. The worst sufferer was Mrs. Lock, who was so crippled that, except when she was campaigning with Mrs. Painter, she could scarcely drag herself about. Under the circumstances the regret expressed by Mrs. Painter that the injury was to her adversary's legs and not to her tongue strikes us as unsportsmanlike. Several of the men were attacked by a small but very poisonous insect, which stung their legs and put them out of action ; and there were some cases of dysentery. But with the disappearance of the liquor and the discovery of celery the bill of health improved. The red cloth and canvas were so plentiful that anybody who wanted a tent could have one, and when it rained, as it did continuously from the 4th to the 8th of August, everyone was under shelter. Alexander and his father now had a home of their own

which was known as 'Government House,' and though the beds were hard and the food was unappetising, they were in luxury by contrast with their plight of the previous week.

The morning of the 8th being clear of rain, and Alexander's foot being sufficiently healed, he planned an excursion to the top of the mountain, the only excursion, indeed, that Inaccessible Island offered. Some of the passengers accompanied him, leaving the rest of the party to the popular occupation of watching for a sail—and occasionally sighting one, which would prove on further inspection to be nothing more hopeful than an albatross.

The top of the mountain was still capped by clouds when the party started, but experience had taught them to be weather-prophets, and the signs all pointed to a fine day. The climb up was long and arduous, taking them, in their home-made moccasins or rags of boots, about seven hours, and before the top was reached the last of the clouds had disappeared, giving place to blue sky and warm sunshine.

A magnificent view was obtained from the summit, the mountain of Tristan towering over them, and the stretch of sea between, though actually twenty miles, seeming a mere rivulet in the clear, washed atmosphere. Nightingale

TRISTAN DA CUNHA IN THE EARLY MORNING

*From 'Three Years in Tristan da Cunha' by K. M. Barrow (Skeffington & Son Ltd.)*

*facing page* 134

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PUTNEY.

Island, closer in to the north-east, looked as rough and inhospitable as Inaccessible. Immediately below, tiny specks of white, were the tents, and westward was spread the Atlantic, as blue as the sky and as serene as an inland lake on a quiet day. On it they could see the ripples cast by the whales as they spouted round the island, blowing up the water to a great height with a noise like the distant discharge of musketry.

So entrancing was the scene that they would have lingered longer had not Symmers—practical man—recalled them to their task, which was to cross the mountain and come down upon the other side. In their passage they found little to note except the albatross, who perched, very tame, upon the rocks, a few clumps of wild celery, and some black lava-like stones. But they found the crater of an extinct volcano, a large, oval, lava-lined basin with a spring of clear water at its bottom, fringed with celery and wild flowers. Reluctantly they dragged themselves from this refreshing sight and began the climb down, reaching the shore at a point opposite to Tristan. One of the objects of the journey was to ascertain whether there was on the island a more sheltered site for the camp than that which they occupied ; but after surveying the shore the party decided that they were better

off where they were. And with this information they returned.

From the 9th to the 14th there was continuous rain, but it brought with it a compensation in the return of the penguins, more numerous even than before. The chief incident of these days was the undoing of Peter Wilson 'Esquire,' who at last fell a victim to his own artfulness. Some of the men had attacked a sea-elephant near the camp, stunned it and cut out its entrails. They had then left it, intending to return a little later and collect such choice morsels as its tongue and liver. Peter, however, was following them at a discreet distance and, as soon as they were out of sight, hurried down to the shore to anticipate them and make off with the titbits. He was pulling open the creature's mouth for the purpose of securing its tongue, when the 'carcase' suddenly and most unexpectedly caught him by the leg and bit it through to the bone. Peter's howls of anguish brought up the others, who gave him no sympathy at all, but roared with laughter, declaring that 'the fox was caught in his own trap.' As it turned out, Peter was seriously hurt. His blood was in an unhealthy state owing to the quantities of raw spirit he had lately consumed, and for some days he lay between life and death.

Alexander takes the opportunity of this accident

to describe in unappetising detail the method followed by the men in attacking these sea-elephants. It was effective but barbarous. They would surprise one as it lay asleep on the shore, and, approaching very cautiously, would gouge out both its eyes with spears. As the poor creature reared up on its tail, moaning in agony and plunging blindly about, they would rush in on it with bludgeons and spears and stab and batter it into unconsciousness. Very often, even then, when they had removed its tongue and liver and left the rest of its carcase as of no value to them, it would recover its senses and escape back into the sea.

On the night of the 15th of August the little settlement met with a crushing disaster. The island was struck by the worst hurricane of the season. Such was its violence that the ground itself shook as though in an earthquake. Every tent was blown flat, its occupants being exposed to a cataract of rain and a gale so powerful that it was almost impossible to stand up. Alexander and his father had just risen and dressed when their tent collapsed. Wrapping themselves up in all the cloth they could rescue from the tearing wind, they lay upon the ground until daybreak, when the Captain's first enquiry was, "What can have become of the females?"

Considering the trouble which the ' females ' had lately given, he might have been pardoned for hoping that the storm had blown them into the sea. He was, however, a chivalrous old gentleman and genuinely anxious ; and, after he and Alexander had tied up and weighted down all that remained of their tent, they started off over the rocks to pay a morning call on Mrs. Lock. The wind met them like a slamming door, so that they could scarcely make headway against it ; and below, a tremendous sea was running, waves of mountainous size rushing on the island as though to overwhelm it. Mrs. Lock was frightened but safe. Her tent was down, but she and her family had crept under their bedding and taken shelter behind a large rock. Everyone else was in a like plight. In a short tour of the settlement the Greigs could not find a tent still standing.

But the collapse of the tents was not the worst misfortune of the hurricane. The cutter, on which such hopes were centred, was gone. It had not been dragged far enough up the cliff, and during the night the sea had claimed it.

So they were back where they had been when first cast on the island. At least, they had no boat, their tents were destroyed, their food-supply was precarious. We may not wonder that

many relapsed into despair and flung themselves on the ground. Yet they had themselves to blame for the major part of the disaster. They should have seen to it that the cutter was safe from the sea ; so small an exertion was needed, and so much depended on it. But that was not their only blunder. There had been at least one day since the cutter was found when it would have been possible to man it and attempt the voyage to Tristan, where they knew that there was a small settlement of Englishmen. They had spent a day of glorious weather, as we know, in climbing the mountain and watching for a rescuing ship. It is easy, of course, to be wise after the event, but the fact remains that when they had the cutter they made no use of it, and when it was gone they gave themselves over for a time to futile despair.

The next few days were devoted to repairing, so far as possible, the havoc of the storm. Alexander discovered a new method of cooking sea-elephant, by mincing it up, putting it in a bag with wild celery, and boiling it in sea-water. The recipe, which is not to be found in any cookery book, produced the most palatable dish on the menus of Inaccessible Island, if we except roast albatross, a delicacy only to be obtained by an arduous climb up the mountain. I pass the

information on for the benefit of anyone who may find himself in Alexander's circumstances.

In the general depression Hormby now caused a diversion by making a fool of himself. It will be recalled that in the happy days of the *Blenden Hall* he had shown some art in the telling of ghost stories. It seemed that he had had a perfect series of personal encounters with the apparitions of deceased relatives ; while innumerable dogs, cats and rats had at different times materialised themselves in his room. When he had frightened Mrs. Lock almost to death with his tales, he had carried them for'ard ; and in the end almost every man of the crew became convinced that some misfortune was pending, because Hurry the steward had thrown a black cat overboard in the Bay of Biscay. After that, shipwreck followed as a matter of course. It might be supposed that Inaccessible Island was not a likely walking-ground for spirits, but it was good enough for Hormby, who one evening came running into the camp in a state of great agitation, declaring that he had just seen the ghosts of three savages on the beach. He was very much mortified when the passengers received his story with incredulity and jibes ; still more, when McLennan and Symmers, who went off to see the ghosts, returned with them on their shoulders and dumped

three empty hampers on the ground. It was a silly little episode, only worth mentioning for the further enlightenment it throws on the character of the Quartermaster.

On the Sunday a service was held, and next day a new flagstaff was erected on the south-westerly point of the island, where it was most likely to be seen by a whaler, if one should run in and lie to for shelter. A flag of red cloth was hoisted and a bottle, containing the following message, written in penguin's blood, was tied to the staff:

> 'On the N.W. side of this island are the remaining part of the crew and passengers of the *Blenden Hall*, wrecked July 23rd, 1821. Should this fall into the hands of the humane, we trust, by the assistance of God, they will do all in their power to relieve us, and the prayers of many unfortunate sufferers will always be for them.
>
> 'Signed,
>
> 'ALEXANDER GREIG,
>
> 'Commander.
>
> 'Island of Inaccessible,
>
> '*August 20th, 1821.*'

The invasion of birds continued. The penguins arrived in tens of thousands, army corps where before they had been companies, settling on the

shore in such masses that from a distance, when the sun was shining, the shore seemed to come alive with shimmering patches of black and white.

Other birds, some of them 'tolerably palatable,' arrived too, and quantities of sea-elephant with their young, which were an easy prey. At night the screaming of the sea-fowl was so incessant that it was difficult for anyone to sleep. In compensation, the birds set about their business and began to lay eggs in myriads; and although the doctors, for some reason, expressed professional doubts of their edibility, everyone ate them in great quantities and throve on them. Presently Alexander noticed, and slyly commented on the fact in his diary, that the doctors themselves, their advice notwithstanding, were putting away a goodly number.

On the Tuesday a great bustle was observed among the crew, who were now living apart from the passengers. At mid-day they paraded round the flagstaff, wearing clean white turbans and carrying six or seven little flags. They fell into file, and with spears sloped martially on their shoulders marched two and two up to 'Government House,' as they called the Captain's tent. It was a comical but puzzling procession, watched at first with some apprehension by the passengers. But for the moment the sailors had no designs

against them. They formed up in two ranks outside 'Government House' and gave three cheers for the Captain as a signal that they wished to speak to him. When he emerged, the boatswain stepped forward and delivered a regular speech. It had distressed them all, he said, to see the Captain 'working like a common slave, by foraging for provisions and carrying heavy loads of wood.' In the future, to spare themselves the pain of this spectacle, they proposed, so far as they could, to relieve the wants of him and his son. This sounded most promising and dutiful, and we should be at a loss to understand why the Captain and Alexander were both so suspicious of this change of heart did not Pepper's account in the *Asiatic Journal* supplement our information. It seems that there had been an open rupture between the officers and passengers on the one side, and the crew on the other. This explains the separate camp to which the latter had moved. Feeling had grown more bitter when the sailors demanded their share of such equipment as there was and were given rather less than their due. It rankled, for example, that they, while greatly outnumbering the other party, should have the smaller of the only two kettles on the island. From such trifles does trouble spring. So it was that the Greigs were now convinced

that, as in the case of Peter Wilson 'Esquire' and his tent, there was a hidden and unworthy motive behind this parade of loyalty and affection. So the Captain made a cold reply, thanking the men for their offer, but stating that so long as they refused any assistance to the passengers he could not take advantage of it. With which he retired into his tent, leaving Alexander with the deputation. And Alexander, being a young man of spirit, could not resist so magnificent a chance of giving the men a piece of his mind. More faithfully than diplomatically he recalled every misdeed they had committed since the wreck, with an emphasis on such incidents as the refusal of Hurry to make him a poultice and the case of Joseph Fowler, who had seen him fall over a precipice with a heavy load of wood and had not stirred a finger to help him. The men began to growl and mutter under this tirade; Captain Greig, from within the tent, kept up a little accompaniment of deprecatory coughs; but Alexander, unchecked, went on to denounce by name the chief offenders. These, one by one, skulked off, leaving only the genuinely well disposed to hear him out to the end; and these, before leaving, insisted on setting up a flagstaff and hoisting one of the flags they had brought, so as to add to the dignity of 'Government House.'

CHAPTER XII

# BOAT-BUILDING, MUTINY AND FAMINE

THE cutter being lost, it is surprising to find that, although the shore was littered with wreckage, some time passed before anyone seriously set to work to build a boat. It may be that all were too busy foraging ; or that, taking the line of least resistance, they were content to stay on their island until someone was good enough to come and take them off, a kindness for which they might have had to wait quite a long time ; or merely that there was a lack of leadership accompanied by a general lethargy. At any rate, so long as there were nests to rob and sea-elephants to slaughter, they did not trouble themselves over-much with plans to escape. Later on, when their stomachs were emptier, they had cause to regret these days of idleness. After all, the difficulties in the way of an escape from Inaccessible were not insuperable, nor even so formidable as to daunt a party of determined men. There was that little colony at Tristan, only twenty miles distant ; on a fine

day the salvation of the Blenden Halls was actually in sight. If only they could put together something, however small, which could make the passage in calm weather, the settlers in Tristan had boats and would soon come to the relief of the castaways who remained.

As often happens, no sooner did one man turn his mind towards boat-building than several of the others followed his example, until the thing became an epidemic and almost everybody was working in one gang or another. The pioneer was Joseph Harris, who started to make a canoe, twenty feet in length. The skeleton was composed of wooden hoops from casks, over which the skins of sea-elephants were stretched. He claimed that his craft, when completed, would be so light that it would ride through the surf better than any boat. The cook, Joseph Nibbs, was the next builder to try his hand. He was a coloured man, who had sailed with Captain Greig on several voyages and had a clean conduct sheet. He set to work on a clumsy punt, in design rather like a West Indian *bâteau*, which he believed would ferry him over to Tristan. The carpenter, however, as was proper, started to make the likeliest craft of the lot, a boat that should hold fourteen persons. It was typical of the Blenden Halls that, having decided to brave

the passage to Tristan, instead of concentrating their united efforts on the construction of one craft which would make the voyage, they split up into groups and competed with each other for the available materials. The passengers, for the most part, having more confidence in the carpenter than in his amateur rivals, gave him all the help they could. A hand-saw and a chisel had been picked up on the shore, but other tools had to be improvised. A bent bolt served as a hammer and a tolerably good axe was made out of a port hinge, ground to an edge.

Indeed, there was need of hurry. The penguins, after staying for four or five days, departed *en masse*. Having laid their eggs, they forsook the island as thoroughly as they had invaded it. Almost simultaneously the sea-elephants disappeared ; and although a quantity of birds like petrels, only larger, paid the island a visit and were found very edible, they soon left too. The only food remaining was the penguins' eggs, of which a vast store was laid in ; but these began to get musty, in which condition a penguin's egg is a degree more unpleasant than a hen's.

To add to the blackness of the outlook, the rain began again and continued without intermission for twelve days.

So the time slipped by. The eggs got mustier,

the rations got shorter. We might have supposed that the boat-builders would have redoubled their efforts. Unfortunately, adversity seldom had a stimulating effect on the crew of the *Blenden Hall*. The men became more idle and mutinous and abusive, and, as the supplies dwindled, it was clear that they were only awaiting an opportunity of picking a quarrel with the passengers, so as to have an excuse for seizing their stocks of food.

Matters went from bad to worse. At length the Captain warned all the male passengers to arm themselves with stout cudgels and hold themselves in readiness to repel an attack. The mutiny came to a head early one morning. A number of the most disaffected men of the crew drifted over to the passengers' tents. For a while they merely lounged about, but their presence was so unusual that at last the Captain spoke to them, advising them to move on and warning them that any violence or insolence would be severely punished. The men took no notice of him, and presently two of them—including Joseph Fowler, one of the most turbulent of the crew—strolled over to the tent where Mrs. Lock, against whom the feeling was particularly strong, and her family were living. They began to threaten and abuse her, swearing that as soon

as the eggs failed they would make soup of her children, a threat which the lady was very ready to credit and which put her into a fine panic.

The moment for action had arrived. Captain Greig gave three 'hurrahs,' the pre-arranged signal, and at once twelve men, armed with cudgels, were at his disposal. Led by the Captain, they charged resolutely down on the loungers. There was a rush and a clash. Fowler went down, stunned by a blow from the Captain, while the others fled in all directions, but not so fast as to escape some stout thwacks on the head and shoulders.

Fowler, on being brought to his senses with a little water, tried to escape, but the Captain ordered him to be secured, and told him that, as a punishment, he should receive fifty lashes with a rope's end. Symmers was then sent across to the sailors to acquaint them with the sentence passed, to demand the presence of the boatswain (Hawkesley) to carry it out and the delivery of James Smith, the other man who had insulted Mrs. Lock, so that he might undergo a like penalty.

The Captain then turned to the passengers and exhorted them to act firmly and scotch the mutiny. Presently Symmers returned with the boatswain and James Smith. He had delicately refrained from explaining to either man why his

presence was required. When Smith learnt of his sentence, he became very agitated ; as did the boatswain too, on discovering that he was to be the executioner. In vain did he refuse the office, on the ground that they were no longer aboard ship, when he would carry out floggings as a matter of duty. The Captain promised him that unless he obeyed at once he would receive the same punishment himself. Whereupon he agreed, muttering that he would be murdered by the other men. Meanwhile the two victims were giving the most solemn assurances of good conduct in the future. But the Captain would not listen to them, and the flogging was about to begin when Mrs. Lock, whose heart was as soft as her head, suddenly appeared, and on her knees and sobbing piteously begged him to pardon the two men. So they were let off with a severe reprimand, Mrs. Lock's unpopularity with the crew sensibly diminishing as a result of her intercession.

After this outbreak the passengers slept with their weapons by their sides, but there was no further trouble for the present, and on September 29th the whole company assembled hopefully and harmoniously to witness the launching of the cook's punt, which was the first of the boats to be completed.

The punt was pushed through the breakers with some difficulty ; but although she shipped a lot of water and became very heavy and unmanageable, being flat-bottomed she did not sink. The cook and his companions scrambled aboard and bailed her out. They then stood up, pointing down at the water and shouting, from which those on shore took it that they had sighted some fish. Unluckily, there was no tackle in the boat and it had to return through the breakers, both oars being lost in the passage. The cook, however, brought the good news of quantities of fish to be seen in the clear water beyond the surf. If these could be caught, starvation, now looming very close, might be warded off. Accordingly, all hands set to work at once to bend nails into fish-hooks and to collect lines. But when the punt was freighted and launched again, it was overturned and all the tackle was lost ; and the next day, when a further attempt was to have been made, the sea was too rough, and so continued until Friday, the 4th of October. On that day the Blenden Halls again assembled expectantly on the beach, and this time they were not disappointed. The punt was brought triumphantly out through the surf, the lines were lowered, the fish were hauled in with almost monotonous regularity ; and although half the

catch was lost on the return journey, a good quantity came safely to land. The fish were of the kind called by the sailors ' sea-wives ' ; they were tough and strongly flavoured, but perfectly good fare for hungry people.

This was good for the sailors, but not so good for the passengers, who, having neither built nor manned the boat, were not regarded as entitled to a share in the haul. As some of them, however, had helped the boat through the surf, they were contemptuously tossed a few fish as their wages.[1]

Fourteen days of almost incessant rain followed, during which it was too rough to fish and the carpenter alone had the heart to continue boat-building. He worked with such a will that on Monday, the 15th, when the weather cleared, his craft was ready for launching. She was got through the surf with some difficulty, being larger and heavier than the punt, but, although somewhat crank, was clearly the faster and more seaworthy craft. Indeed, the Captain announced his readiness to sail her himself to Tristan as soon as the weather was favourable. Her crew caught a plentiful supply of fish, but when she was coming in she capsized and the whole catch was lost. The boat itself took a hard pounding, but was saved from destruction.

[1] *Asiatic Journal.*

CHAPTER XIII

# TROUBLE AND A COURT OF ENQUIRY

I MUST leave the activities of the boat-builders for the moment to relate some discreditable events which took place during those days when the little colony was weatherbound. They sat in their tents, while the rain poured down, and I regret to say that they spent the time for the most part in quarrelling. This had been their chief relaxation when the *Blenden Hall* was drifting about in the doldrums; it remained their chief relaxation on Inaccessible Island. Surely they were the most cantankerous crowd that was ever cast away on a desert island. Says Alexander sententiously:

> 'I must acknowledge that to me it was always incomprehensible what could induce such a feeling of hostility to exist at this period, not only between the parties just mentioned [Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter], but with few exceptions among the passengers generally. It is true that our troubles were calculated to ruffle our tempers and render us irritable;

but at the same time one would have imagined that in our extreme exigency, with starvation almost inevitable, the common dictates of humanity would have been sufficient to suppress outbreaks and induce each to commiserate his fellow-sufferer.'

The only occasions on which the passengers displayed any real harmony were when they were threatened by the crew, or when the contemptible Hormby perpetrated some particularly egregious act. Hormby, that bluff good fellow of the early days of the voyage, had now sunk to be the butt of the island. The figure he cut was too sorry for indignation and too foolish for pity : it merely excited merriment. His ignorance was almost incredible. When the first cargo of fish was lost he became dreadfully depressed, declaring that it was useless to try to catch any more, since those which had escaped would be sure to tell the others ! He was the victim of the most absurd superstitions. Among the articles which had come ashore from the wreck was the *Blenden Hall's* figurehead, a fine model of a Highland chief. One evening Hormby was discovered surreptitiously trying to destroy it, by piling the staves of tar-barrels round it and setting them alight. When caught in the act, he explained that he had

read somewhere of a shipwrecked crew with whom everything had gone ill until they had accidentally destroyed the ship's figurehead, when they were immediately rescued.

During these days Mrs. Hormby had little to say to her husband. She could neither forget nor forgive his base conduct on the wreck, and, although she rejected the advice of some of the sailors to have nothing more to do with him, she treated him with a chilly disdain which was probably more wounding than ostracism.

The poor lady led a lonely life on the island, since Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter, who should have stood by her, had carried ashore with them all their social prejudices. They considered her, quite unwarrantably, to be of a class with which they should not be asked to associate. Generally they ignored her, but sometimes they condescended to snub her. "How horrid it must be to marry a common soldier!" Mrs. Painter would remark loftily in her presence; adding, "I am the wife of a commissioned officer." Fortunately, Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter were too busy prosecuting their own feud to waste much time on their social inferiors. Although, by the Captain's orders, their tents had been widely separated, after the hurricane they had carefully re-pitched them close together. In fact, they

could not keep out of each other's company, nor, when they met, out of the most violent squabbles. Alexander describes one 'regular row' which he witnessed.

'Hearing a great noise in the direction of Mrs. Lock's tent, and observing a crowd collect —neither, by the by, very uncommon events— curiosity induced me, like others, to go towards it. I there saw the lady herself standing outside; her long black hair almost covering her face, her eyes flashing fire, and her dress in great disorder. A few yards distant stood Mrs. Painter (evidently the cause of Mrs. Lock's anger), pretending to enjoy the scene. No sooner did the latter see me than she commenced the following elegant effusion: "Me glad you come, Mr. Ellic" (the abbreviation of Alexander); "what you think? That vile hussy"—pointing to Mrs. Painter—"she say me no Commodore Lock's wife—me lose my 'tifcate—what you call it?—on board ship. Me have no prove now. Please God, me ever get back to Bombay, Lock shall know all and turn little Painter out. She"—pointing again at Mrs. Painter—"she no better than my servant Peggy; her father only boatman and she sew bonnet, what you call those people—man—man—makers?[1] Tell me, Mr. Ellic,

[1] The word which was too much for the lady was evidently 'mantua-maker.'

where I find Captain ; he know I marry Commodore Lock." I once or twice endeavoured to stop the lady, but to no purpose, and therefore told her that my father was too ill to leave his tent ; and even if he were able to do so, he could render her no assistance. I begged that she would wait patiently until we got relieved ; and then, if Mrs. Painter had stated anything untrue, she could bring an action against her for defamation of character and obtain heavy damages. During all this harangue Mrs. Painter remained in the same place, affecting to be convulsed with laughter ; upon which Mrs. Lock said, " I do so, Mr. Ellic. Cost me ten thousand rupees, me bring action for def'mation ; me have satisfaction, please God, me ever get back to Bombay." '

Mrs. Painter may have been more disturbed by Mrs. Lock's threats than she affected to be. Her Painter was only a lieutenant, and commodores were powerful people who could make things very nasty for offensive subordinates. But whatever her fears, she hid them under an air of contempt. Raising her right hand to a level with her shoulder, she pointed a scornful finger at Mrs. Lock and in the voice of a tragedy queen exclaimed, " Behold the she-devil and her little imps ! " With this parting shot she retired in triumph to her own tent. Her description was

too apt for the composure of the spectators. Poor Mrs. Lock looked the part only too well, with her two naked children sprawling at her feet, while the heads of Peggy and MissMorton popped continually and inquisitively out of their tent.

All this was a storm in a teacup, but on the 18th of October a more serious scandal rent the little community. They were all about their daily occupations when suddenly the cry—longed for, dreamed of and almost despaired of—"A ship in sight!"—rang out. In an instant it was echoed on all sides, and everyone began excitedly to scramble up the mountain to obtain a view, to light a fire and to make signals. Nothing, however, was to be seen; and later two men who had climbed to the top of the mountain came down with the news that not a sail was in sight. It was a false alarm. But who had started the report? After some enquiry it was traced back to Joseph Fowler, that ringleader in mischief among the crew. He admitted giving the alarm, but solemnly asserted that he had seen a ship; and, while nobody believed his protests, nobody could conceive what his object could be in playing so cruel a trick upon the community.

That evening, however, Painter came running up to the Captain's tent, crying out excitedly that he had been robbed. More fortunate than

some of his companions, he had been able to bring with him from the wreck a number of valuables, including a gold chronometer with chain and seals, some money and a few articles of jewellery.

> 'Early in October, Mrs. Pepper having been recommended to take exercise[1], we were absent for several hours, during which time some person or persons took the opportunity of entering our tent and purloining a box containing a gold chronometer, chain, three seals, a ring and a key, a purse with eight guineas and two pounds in silver, with various other articles, value altogether about £170; which, after the most diligent enquiry and search, were never recovered. This circumstance needs no comment, but shows sufficiently the vile disposition of some of the crew.'[2]

Painter, for reasons which we shall shortly appreciate, does not tell the whole story, but Alexander does. His father being too ill to attend to the matter, he came forward as the Captain's deputy. He was not personally on good terms with Painter, but promised to do what he could to recover the missing property. He sent for Symmers, who had also had a tiff with Painter, but also offered his services. Painter then

[1] Mrs. Pepper (Painter) was 'expecting.' [2] *Asiatic Journal.*

explained that when a ship was reported in sight, he and his wife had climbed a little way up the mountain and had been absent for some time from the camp. (This is not quite the same as the version in the *Asiatic Journal*.) On returning to their tent, they found that a thief had entered it in their absence.

There was nothing for it but to make a general search of the camp, a difficult and delicate task which was more likely to end in broken heads than in the detection of the offender. Alexander was the constable, with Symmers supporting him and Painter in the background to identify his trinkets if they should be found.

The first tent visited was that of the Hormbys, with whom were lodging James Smith (one of the men who had insulted Mrs. Lock) and Stephen White, another turbulent character who nevertheless had shown some kindness to Peggy, Mrs. Lock's servant. Altogether it was a dubious *ménage* which had drawn scandalous comment from the neighbours. Alexander explained the object of his visit, for which he claimed the authority of the Captain, and the two sailors with some grumbling allowed their part of the tent to be examined. Nothing, however, was found. Alexander then put it to Hormby as politely as he could that, while no offence was intended,

the order was general and he must allow his possessions to be searched too. Hormby was furious. He had never been so insulted in his life. That he, holding the King's commission, should be treated like a common pickpocket ! And when Painter was unwise enough to join in the wrangle, there was a spirited exchange of abuse, which ended by Painter telling Hormby that he was too big a blackguard to be taken notice of at all.

The search was at last allowed, and the true reason for Hormby's indignation came out. He had not got the Painters' trinkets, but he had artfully secreted a very large supply of food and drink, including seven or eight bottles of Hollands. Since he spent most of his time going round the camp trying to cadge from the others, while representing himself as completely destitute, the exposure of his hoard was distinctly awkward for him.

The next tent to be visited was Fowler's. He lived near the Painters, and in spite of, or perhaps because of, his bad character and his enmity to Mrs. Lock, was the little lieutenant's constant companion on foraging expeditions. This was another friendship which had set wagging the tongues of Inaccessible Island. Fowler expressed the greatest willingness to be searched ; in fact, he was so glib and so willing that

Alexander, who had been expecting a rough reception, began to have his suspicions. Presently the man slightly over-reached himself by asking Painter if the trinkets were packed in anything.

"Yes, don't you remember?" replied Painter in some surprise. "Mrs. Painter put them into the basket yesterday."

"Oh, yes, so I do," exclaimed Fowler. And when Alexander observed that his memory must be very treacherous if he had already forgotten something which he had witnessed only the day before, the man looked confused and made no reply.

It was obviously useless to prosecute the search, news of which by now was buzzing round the camp. The innocent would be offended and incommoded, while the guilty party had had plenty of time to hide the spoil. But just as Alexander and Symmers were about to give up, Hormby appeared, attended by his two sailor friends, and asked rather nastily if the search was really to be general.

"Most certainly," replied Alexander, although on the point of abandoning it. Whereupon Hormby, even more nastily, recommended him to have a look at the tent occupied by the Painters, for it was there, he said, that the missing articles would be found.

"Oh, you may examine mine with pleasure,"

said Painter at once, " if it will afford any satisfaction to Mr. Hormby." And turning, he called to his wife, " Ann, the corporal "—an insulting allusion to the Quartermaster's old rank—" thinks we have stolen our own property, and our tent is to be searched."

" No, you little jackanapes," retorted the enraged Hormby, " I never believed you had any property of your own to steal ; but I'm sure we shall find plenty belonging to others."

How much Hormby knew, and how much he merely suspected, we can only conjecture ; but his manœuvre succeeded beyond his hopes. While Painter was all readiness for the search, his wife was strangely reluctant. In fact, she became very agitated and, as bundle after bundle was pulled out and opened, her distress increased, until at last, when the largest bundle of the lot was reached, she nearly fainted. The string securing it snapped, and four or five dozen very fine shirts, a roll of scarlet cloth of the best quality, and a variety of other articles fell to the ground. The look of the shirts was oddly familiar. Alexander had seen them before, and quite recently. And then the truth came to him : they were the fellows of the shirts which he and most of the male passengers on the island were wearing at the moment, given them by Dr. McLennan

out of that box which had come ashore and then so mysteriously disappeared. Here was one secret come to light, and very inconveniently for the Painters. While the Lieutenant looked foolish and his wife displayed the recognised symptoms of a lady in a faint, Hormby crowed with triumph, and the hated figure of Mrs. Lock, never far off when trouble was afoot, was observed pirouetting clumsily but exultantly outside the tent.

Possibly the sight of Mrs. Lock acted as a restorative. Mrs. Painter recovered her composure and called Heaven to witness that the shirts had been presented to her by Joseph Fowler. She added that had she only known to whom they belonged she would of course have returned them to their owner at once. Unfortunately for her case, the shirts lay on the ground displaying with damning clearness the name of McLennan worked in full on them. Mrs. Lock pressed forward to point a finger at the marking, and executed another little war dance of glee at this complete exposure of her enemy. "What you think, Mr. Ellic?" she asked. "They hang? Transport? What they do for stealing shirts?"

Alexander took no notice of her, but told Painter drily that he was sorry the search had ended so unfortunately for him, and that, as

everyone on the island now knew what was happening, it was quite useless to go on with it. Painter agreed, but, not in the least abashed by the reminder that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones, requested Alexander to summon a general meeting, without giving any reason for holding it. He had, he said, strong suspicions of the identity of the culprit and believed he could unmask him in a public cross-examination.

So the next day the meeting was called. The Captain being still too ill to attend, Alexander took his place as President of the Court ; and although he assures us that the office was most unwelcome, he seems to have got a lot of enjoyment out of the first and, so far as we know, the only legal proceedings that have ever taken place on Inaccessible Island.

When all were assembled he took his seat on an old water-cask and announced the purpose of the meeting. Someone had broken into Mr. Painter's tent and stolen his property. Surely he could rely on the aid of every respectable man on the island in bringing the criminal to justice !

He first examined Painter himself.

*Judge :* " About what time, Lieutenant Painter, did you leave your tent ? "

*Lieutenant Painter :* " About half an hour

previous to Fowler's stating that a ship was in sight —but Mrs. Lock is declaring behind me that she knows all about it."

Mrs. Lock, anxious to follow up her success of the previous day, was dancing about and interrupting on the edge of the crowd. Accepting Painter's remark as an invitation to give evidence, she now pushed her way into the centre.

*Judge :* " Well, Mrs. Lock, what do you know about it ? "

*Mrs. Lock :* " Me tell you all, Mr. Ellic. That creature Fowler, upon my word and honour he came to my tent and swore he eat my children all up. That vile hussy Mrs. Painter, she send him. She says she sure me stole her jew'ly, what you call it ? "

This speech was punctuated by interjections from Mrs. Painter—" Very ladylike, Mrs. Lock ! " " That's right, go on ! " " Oh, you wretch ! " and so forth. At its conclusion there was a heinous contempt of court, for Gibson, a young cadet, coming up behind the judge, deftly kicked away the water-cask. Alexander, falling headlong forward, nearly overturned Mrs. Lock, and the laughter in court was such that the proceedings were interrupted for some minutes. Gibson, of course, explained that the upset was a pure accident, and Alexander, slightly ruffled,

resumed his seat and his examination of Mrs. Lock. He begged her not to introduce irrelevant matter into her evidence, but the lady, once fairly started, was entirely beyond control. She had never had, nor was likely to have again, such a chance of paying off old scores, and she paraded without mercy the grievances of months. "Little Painter," as she called him, his wife and the man Fowler used to insult her daily; and she was going on to describe what she believed to be the true—and highly improper—relationship between Fowler and Mrs. Painter when Alexander at last broke in on her and vowed that if she said another word that was not directly connected with the robbery, she must leave the court and be no more heard.

*Mrs. Lock:* "Well, Mr. Ellic, me take your advice. Me no say one word more about it. Let me see—me saw the little wretch and his wife—me quite sure he little wretch—go out to dinner at Fowler's tent. Shortly after, me heard ship came to take all off, but my leg so bad me no able to leave the tent, and presently me see Fowler lounge about little Painter's tent, but me no think he about any good; he too bad to be about any good." (Laughter in court.)

*Judge:* "Did you see him enter Mr. Painter's tent, Mrs. Lock?"

*Mrs. Lock :* " No, me no watch him partic'ly, me only think about getting off. Me watch him one day going up mountain with Mrs. Painter——"

As another scandalous suggestion was obviously on the point of slipping out, Alexander cut the lady short and, after ascertaining that she really knew nothing more about the robbery, called on Painter to resume his interrupted evidence.

*Judge :* " I think I understand you to state, Mr. Painter, that Joseph Fowler knew you had been fortunate enough to save some jewellery from the wreck ? "

*Lieutenant Painter :* " Oh, yes, most certainly he did ; but I have a very high opinion of Joseph Fowler, and so has Mrs. Painter."

This last admission was too much for Mrs. Lock, confirming as it did what she had been trying to insinuate. Forgetting that, ever since the wreck, she had complained that she could scarcely move from the injuries to her legs, she now danced round the court, clapping her hands. Order was not restored for some minutes.

*Judge :* " Pray, Lieutenant Painter, was Joseph Fowler in his tent when you and Mrs. Painter first reached it ? "

*Lieutenant Painter :* " Yes, sir, he was ; but shortly after he left, and soon returned, stating

that a ship was in sight, when, accompanied by Mrs. Painter, I went partly up the mountain, and, upon again reaching our tent, we found that a visitor had been there during our absence and that the jewellery was gone."

Joseph Fowler was then called.

*Judge :* "Joseph Fowler, you reported, as you admit, that a ship was in sight. What motive had you for doing so ? "

*Fowler :* "Why, because I saw one, to be sure."

*Judge :* "I am not at all sure, sir, of anything of the sort. And pray where did you go after you saw the ship ? "

*Fowler :* "Why, I never left my tent ; but Mrs. Lock would swear my life away."

*Judge :* "You have frequently sworn that you would take hers, or I am misinformed. But let me ask you if you are not equally anxious with us all to be relieved ? "

Before Fowler could answer, a fresh witness appeared. This was Miss Morton, who whispered in Alexander's ear that she and Peggy had both seen Fowler prowling round the Painters' tent and had commented on his lack of interest in the ship which he had reported in sight. This, in Alexander's opinion, fixed the guilt on Fowler.

*Judge :* "I really cannot see, Lieutenant Painter, that I can render you any further service

in this business. It is evident, I think, to everyone present that the report of a ship being in sight—which Joseph Fowler acknowledges he circulated—was a complete fabrication. The very circumstance of his stating that he retired to his tent soon after he saw it, and did not again leave, has of itself a very suspicious appearance and goes far to establish a proof, if any were wanted, that he did not see a ship ; as, had he done so, he would have manifested the same anxiety with the rest to make signals and endeavour to obtain relief, instead of hiding himself away in his tent. But I am offered abundant evidence to prove that at the time he alleges he was in his own tent he was at Mrs. Painter's. It is also extremely difficult for me to believe he had not some worse motive than the disgraceful one of causing us all such cruel disappointment under our present sufferings. This conviction is strengthened by the fact that not only Mrs. Lock and her servant Peggy, but also Miss Morton (a young lady who I am sure everyone acquainted with will admit is quite incapable of speaking aught but the truth), are ready to swear that they saw this man Fowler lounging about Mr. Painter's tent almost immediately after the report about the ship was circulated. This circumstance, to say the least of it, would be deemed strong circumstantial

evidence against Joseph Fowler, even were he a man of good character ; but when coupled with the fact of his being a most worthless one (if only for his threats to an unprotected woman like Mrs. Lock), I am compelled to express my firm belief that he alone has deprived you of those articles, of which no other man in the island knew you were in possession."

*Lieutenant Painter :* " I do not believe anything of the sort, sir."

*Judge :* " Whatever you may believe, sir, is a matter of no moment to me ; but I am satisfied there are very few, if any, present but what have formed the same opinion as myself, from all that has just transpired. As for you, Joseph Fowler, I am convinced that you spread the report regardless of the feelings of your companions, for the express purpose of plundering their tents during their absence. The circumstance of your having been detected in committing similar acts, as the purloining of Dr. McLennan's trunk, etc., warrants me in drawing such a conclusion ; and although Lieutenant Painter may entertain a very high sense of your integrity, I am desired to tell you that your Captain and officers have a very different one. They, I am grieved to say, consider you capable of joining in any plot, however atrocious ; but be assured that the least

repetition of any threat or insult will subject you to that punishment from which you have only so recently escaped. I wish it to be understood that the message I am now about to deliver is equally applicable to all. The Captain requests me to state that he is determined to make a severe example of the very first that shows any disposition to disobey his orders ; and, for the well-being of the whole, the same discipline that existed on board the *Blenden Hall* will be enforced. To enable him to carry his plans into effect, the passengers—and, I am happy to inform you, all the most influential portion of our crew ; particularly those who showed themselves deserving the name of British sailors on the wreck—have signified their intention to support him to the fullest extent in preserving order on the island. With respect to your loss, Lieutenant Painter, I regret it is not in my power to assist you further in its recovery ; and still more to be obliged to add that, after countenancing a man like Joseph Fowler, you could scarcely expect any other treatment. How far you may consider it consistent with the character of an officer and a gentleman to continue that acquaintance, of course, remains with yourself to decide ; and it is equally at the discretion of the gentlemen engaged in the same distinguished service with

yourself to ascertain hereafter how far you maintained its dignity by so doing."

We have, of course, only Alexander's own report of the trial, from which it appears that, apart from the unrehearsed episode of the overturned water-cask, he was dignified, eloquent and even pompous. If some of the others, and notably Master Gibson, were inclined to turn the affair into a mock trial, Alexander was as grave and judicial as the surroundings—and his years—allowed. But this is his version. The summing up, as he gives it, recalls the flowery periods of Roman generals, which, as reported, represent not what they said, but what the historian felt they ought to have said. In sad fact, that bad man, Joseph Fowler, ' capable of joining in any plot, however atrocious,' does not appear to have taken these heavy censures to heart. We shall meet him again.

On the conclusion of Alexander's speech the Painters and Fowler left the court in high dudgeon, muttering threats against all concerned in their discomfiture. So the business ended. When we reflect that everybody present had been living for some days on a short ration of musty eggs, we know not whether to be more surprised at their high spirits or at the rancour with which they pursued their vendettas.

CHAPTER XIV

# THE DARKEST HOUR

After the various litigants had left the High Court of Inaccessible Island with stains on their respective characters, a more serious matter was broached. The question of food was becoming desperate. The birds had all flown away, and such eggs as were left were mostly bad. Very soon, even these would be consumed, and then the community would be faced with starvation.

When Alexander had finished setting forth the situation, the cook, Joseph Nibbs, stepped forward. He and his messmates, he declared, had been on short commons for a week. "It is no harder to perish by sea than by land," he added, and promised that if he could get his boat through the breakers, he would sail at once for Tristan da Cunha.

These brave words were hardly out of his mouth when a violent squall, as though in answer, broke on the island, dispersing the assembly and putting out of the question for the moment any attempt on the part of the cook to carry out his intention. Alexander retired to his tent, where

he found his father lying sick and spent, an old man half-starved on a diet of musty eggs. The sight so unnerved him that he was on the point of breaking down when he was aware that someone had followed him in. It was the cook. Nibbs was an old family retainer who had known Alexander since he was a child. Between voyages he would live at the Captain's house, and had a name for his excellent curries and Eastern dishes. He was, in fact, more a friend than a servant. Going up to the Captain, he offered him his hand and burst into tears, exclaiming, " I little thought, Captain Greig, ever to see this day ; but I will bring you and Mr. Alexander here relief if I perish in the attempt. I am determined to start to-morrow morning for the island [Tristan da Cunha], and if I find it affords any greater chance of living than this, I will return directly for you both. But should I never see you again, Captain Greig, God bless you, sir, for all your kindness to me."

With these words the cook shook Alexander by the hand and left the tent.

When he was gone, the Captain said : " It is perhaps a silly notion, Alexander, but something tells me that I shall never see that poor fellow again. Be sure and prevent his going if the weather proves bad and I should not be well enough to attend."

Alexander gave his word, and the Captain, his mind set at rest, fell asleep. Later on in the evening, however, awakened by a noisy altercation between Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter, he turned once more to the old problem : how was food to be got to keep the Blenden Halls alive until it was practicable to attempt the passage to Tristan ? Plan after plan was discussed and rejected, the most feasible suggestion being that some of the more active sailors should be induced to climb up the mountain and camp there. They would find a number of albatross remaining on which they might live, while bringing down supplies of eggs to their comrades on the shore. The plan might have been possible had the community been less divided and its leadership more resolute. As it was, the contumacy of the crew was thought to be a fatal objection. Under pressure, they might shift their quarters up the mountain ; but they certainly would not part with a single egg to the passengers.

The next two days were impossibly stormy, but the third day dawned fine and serene, and the cook determined to make his promised attempt.[1] The entire colony attended the launch. The

[1] It is odd that the enterprise should have been left to the cook and his clumsy punt, when the larger and more seaworthy boat built by the carpenter was available. We can only suppose that this had been more seriously damaged on its trial trip (see page 152) than Alexander gives us to understand, and that it was still under repair.

boat was taken successfully through the surf and brought to in the smoother water beyond. Even Captain Greig struggled down to the shore, arriving just as the punt was clear of the breakers. He called out to Nibbs, begging him to give up the enterprise. The wind, he pointed out, was from the north-east, so that he would run into a heavy swell directly he was out of shelter of Inaccessible Island. Some of the passengers added their entreaties to the Captain's ; starving though they were, they would not willingly see these comrades of theirs go to their death. But the cook was unyielding, and the men with him, who declared that they had tasted no food for two days, were equally resolved. They were the pick of the *Blenden Hall's* company, a sailmaker, a gunner and three able seamen, including Taylor, the man who had given Alexander his jacket during the first night on the island. One by one they came up to the Captain and respectfully took leave of him, promising at all hazards to bring help. Then they waded out to their frail craft. Their comrades on the shore sent up a wavering cheer. Sail was hoisted, and in half an hour the boat had rounded the corner and was out of sight. We may draw our own conclusion from the fact that not a single officer or passenger trusted himself to this gallant venture :

they were content to leave the risk and the glory to the ship's cook and five plain seamen.

About mid-day some of the people climbed a short way up the mountain. In the lee of the island the water was perfectly calm, but in the broad channel between Tristan and Inaccessible a stiff sea was running. Nothing could be seen of the cook's boat. It is true that he had solemnly promised to return if he found the swell too heavy, and the Captain had even picked out a landing-place on the other side of the island ; so that at first the anxiety was not acute. The chances were eagerly debated, the view being on the whole pessimistic. So clumsy and ill-made a boat as the cook's could not sail more than three or four knots, even with a favourable wind, and if it was not swamped in the chops of the channel there was every likelihood that the current would carry it out to sea. Hormby added to the prevailing gloom by pointing out that even if the sea were as calm as a millpond, the cook, having started on a Friday, could not hope to get across. And for once that wretched croaker was right in his conclusion.

On the following morning the party went up the mountain to light a fire, this being the signal which the cook, assuming he had reached Tristan, would have answered. But the men, when they

reached the top, found themselves in the clouds, and returned without accomplishing their purpose. After another night had passed without news, hope was almost abandoned. The rock-bottom of despair had been reached. No one had food to last more than three days, some had no food at all. It was too rough to fish, and the party from the top reported that scarcely an albatross was to be seen. It was the darkest hour.

In their distraction they made frantic and futile efforts to launch the remaining boats, to cross that short stretch of tumbled water on the other side of which fish in myriads were mocking their famine. All hands were mustered to help the boats through the surf, but the breakers flung them back on to the beach, and the boats themselves, on which rested the last hopes of the Blenden Halls, were almost dashed to pieces.

Alexander writes :

> ' During our sojourn, now upwards of three months, my fortitude had never forsaken me. I had undergone severe trials and privations, existing frequently on the most loathsome food, particularly in a raw state. My mind had been oft filled with horror at the scenes I witnessed, and harrowed by the most gloomy contemplations of the future, yet I had borne

up ; for, bad as were the means of supporting life, still provision of some description had always been found. But now, to see my father reduced to absolute want and the passengers in a state of starvation, begging from those whose little yet held out, was beyond my fortitude to endure.

'I threw myself down by the side of my father, who was too ill to remove from bed, and taking him by the hand, said, "Well, I suppose it is now all over with us."'

But before his father could reply, an amazing hubbub was heard. It was a cheer, the most unlikely sound that morning in that place, taken up and repeated again and again. Alexander plunged out of the tent. Men were running down the mountain-side huzzaing wildly. "Thank God, the poor cook is safe!" exclaimed the Captain, and bade Alexander haul down the flag and run it up again as a signal to the men to come and report. They altered course, still waving their caps and cheering.

"A ship lying off Tristan da Cunha!"

"But what of the cook?" asked Alexander.

The men were silent. They had forgotten the cook. Rather shamefacedly they now suggested that the boat might have reached Nightingale Island, ten miles distant, carried thither by the

current. They had lit fires but had had no reply. Meanwhile there was a ship—a real ship—in sight.

Alexander turned back to the tent disappointed. A ship off Tristan was a meagre consolation. Probably she had only come in to water, and such feeble fires as the Blenden Halls might light would be unnoticed. He brought the disheartening information back to his father.

The next day was thick and hazy, but Perry the carpenter managed to launch his boat. He even set a course towards Tristan, but found that he could make no headway against the current. Tristan was just distinguishable, but nothing could be seen of the strange ship. After beating about fruitlessly for a while, the carpenter brought his boat back. There seemed little doubt that where he had failed, the cook, in his clumsier craft, was unlikely to have succeeded. Nibbs and his companions, almost beyond a doubt, had been carried away by that same baffling current. But, unable to make Tristan or to regain Inaccessible Island, there was still a bare chance that they had landed on Nightingale.

The rain now set in for several days, continuing until October 30th. The Blenden Halls would really have starved but for two circumstances. Some of their number climbed the

mountain and camped in the higher parts, where a few surviving albatross and the celery gave them a bare sustenance ; while the two boats—the carpenter's and one built by the Symmers brothers—the injuries they had received in the breakers having been made good, were able once to put out and fish and brought back a fair catch.

At last a fine day came. Captain Greig was anxious for the carpenter to sail without delay for Tristan, since another spell of stormy weather was likely to be the end of the Blenden Halls. But the man refused. He wanted to make a trial trip before attempting the more difficult journey ; he proposed therefore to sail completely round the island and to visit Nightingale. When all were in such straits it seemed a waste of fair weather ; but the Captain was too sick a man to force through his point of view, while Alexander, who was his deputy, was too young to carry much authority. Anyhow, the carpenter was master of the boat and the situation and had his way ; and Alexander agreed to accompany him on the expedition.

First of all they prudently caught a good supply of fish. Then, clear of the breakers and the reefs, they steered west and landed on the side of the island opposite to the camp. They found the coast littered with wreckage, including the stern

of a long-boat on which they were able to decipher the letters R-D—B-Y. After picnicking off some of the fish they had caught, they launched the boat again, completed the tour of the island, and set a course for Nightingale. They found it a mere rock, as barren as Inaccessible and about half the size. After sailing round it and finding it quite unoccupied, they returned. Although they had failed to find the cook and his companions, this trial trip put new heart into the Blenden Halls. The carpenter's boat had been proved sound, and the neighbouring waters navigable. Moreover, an excellent supply of fish had been obtained which would ward off starvation for some days. Hope, therefore, flickered up once more.

The next day was equally fine. The luck seemed at last to have turned. Here was the chance, but for some strange reason the carpenter would not take it. He was a good fellow, with an excellent record, and he had sailed with Captain Greig for fifteen years. But now he refused to start, and would give no reasonable excuse for his delay. The precious hours of sunshine slipped by. Loud were the murmurs against Perry, and in the end the passengers approached the Captain in a body. Their plight was too desperate, they urged, to take account of the

niceties of private property. If the carpenter would sail his boat, well and good ; if not, they asked for authority to take possession of it, if necessary by force, and man it themselves.

The request was quite fair ; we can only wonder that Captain Greig should have submitted so tamely to the carpenter's mood. But he was a sick man, unsure of his hold on his crew. He now sent for Perry and remonstrated with him. Had he any valid reason for delay ? The carpenter muttered something about a dangerous passage. The Captain pointed out that in such weather as they were enjoying the danger was trifling in a boat as staunch as his. The carpenter was silent. We may guess that he was a beggar on horseback. He who all his life had been a servant was now a master—not only of a boat, but of the fate of nearly eighty souls. Here was power with which he could not bear to part. His task accomplished, he would be just the carpenter again, at the beck and call of those who were now his suppliants ; his brief rule would be over. So he clung to it, heedless that his own life, with the lives of all the others, might be forfeit to his obstinacy. It is the psychology of such incidents as this that makes life on a desert island so interesting.

Nevertheless, the attitude of Perry must have

been intensely irritating to his fellow-Crusoes. Even the Captain at length lost patience and rated him as a 'dog in the manger,' swearing that if the next day was fine and he still dallied, his boat would be taken from him. With this the carpenter went sulkily off.

But the next day was not fine, nor the next, nor the next after that. The chance had been let slip. The weather broke hopelessly, and for eight days the Blenden Halls were stormbound and hungry, with little to eat but stale fish and nothing to do but sit in their tents and bicker and curse the carpenter.

CHAPTER XV

# RESCUE

SUNDAY, the 4th of November, was Alexander's eighteenth birthday. Some of his friends were resolved to celebrate it so far as their resources allowed, these resources being increased most opportunely by the appearance and slaughter of two sea-elephants. The tongues and livers were cut out and set aside for the feast, for which a few albatross eggs and roots of wild celery had also been saved. The cooking completed, the party donned their best red shirts and white turbans and sat down to the amplest meal they had had for some days, eaten off a rough plank and washed down with water drunk out of old Burgundy bottles. They were too determinedly festive to be put off by trifles ; indeed, another point of note in the psychology of the desert island is the light-hearted way in which castaways, however miserable and desperate their circumstances, can forget them for an occasion. The banqueters even formally toasted Alexander, he as formally rising to reply ; and so ended the strangest birthday-party he had ever known.

Five days of howling wind and raging sea

followed. The eggs and the fish were completely consumed and only the carcases of the sea-elephants remained, oily and revolting muck which the Blenden Halls, famished though they were, found the greatest difficulty in swallowing. The carpenter received some black looks and hard words for the chance he had missed, and relented so far as to admit his regret that he had not sailed when the weather was favourable.

At last, on November 9th, there was a change. The wind shifted and blew favourably for Tristan, and the sea was much calmer. It was, unfortunately, a Friday, and once more Hormby's voice was raised in ineffectual protest. But no one listened to him. By this time many were so weak from starvation that they could only just crawl down to the beach to see the start. There was no cheering. The boat was taken safely through the breakers, and Perry, now a humbler and wiser man, approached the Captain to take leave of him. "Nothing but a watery grave," he vowed, "shall prevent me from bringing you relief."

Again there were no officers or passengers among the nine men who went with him. When they had pulled out a short distance they stood up in the boat and cheered. No answer came from the shore. That earlier departure of the

cook and his men was still fresh in memory; and after so much disappointment there was no jubilation and little hope that these new adventurers would achieve their task or return from the attempt alive. The men on the shore silently watched them hoist sail and slip away before a gentle breeze. Presently they were out of sight.

Later in the day Alexander climbed the mountain alone. When he reached the top he picked up the boat again, a white speck on the Atlantic, well on its way towards Tristan. He watched it until it disappeared, and was about to return when he thought he saw a spiral of smoke rise from the east point of Nightingale Island. Could this be the cook's party? He stalked and slew an albatross and went back to the camp with the bird and his news.

After the departure, two boats were left on the island. The first was a rough *bâteau* built by the Symmers brothers, the second was Joseph Harris's canoe, which sailed pretty well. Although neither craft was really fit to undertake a long voyage, both were serviceable for fishing in calm weather.

When Alexander returned with his story of smoke on Nightingale Island, the Symmers volunteered to take their boat across and investigate. So the next day they sailed, Alexander

going with them, and, the wind being fair, they made the journey and effected a landing without mishap. But they found nothing but bare rock, without vegetation or inhabitant, human or otherwise. The return journey to Inaccessible was not so easy, as the wind was against them and they had to pull most of the distance with their rough paddles. So it was nearly dusk before they got back.

Their boat and the canoe, which had been out fishing, were barely beached when a cry—a feeble, incredulous cry—went up from the camp. Turning their eyes seawards, the men on the shore saw two boats drawing in to the island. In the first excitement they made sure that these were the cook's and the carpenter's. But as they came closer it was seen that these were no make-shift tubs, but real boats with 'painted sides.' Strange faces looked out of them. Unfamiliar voices hailed the camp. It was rescue at last.

The castaways were at first dumb. When their deliverers rose and cheered, they stood staring silently at them, too overcome even to help them haul in their boats, perhaps unready after so many mischances to trust the witness of their eyes. It was the 10th of November. For three months and eighteen days they had been stranded on this detestable island. It seemed to

them a lifetime, and these strangers creatures of another world.

But the strangers stepped ashore and came forward with outstretched hands. The Blenden Halls grasped them in eager gratitude but still in silence. Then they saw with wonder that some of these newcomers were their own people—the carpenter and those who had sailed with him ; but washed, shaved, and clad in civilised clothes, changed beyond recognition.

The carpenter himself stood forward and shook Captain Greig's hand. " Allow me," he said, " to congratulate you that I have been enabled to fulfil my promise to bring you relief. This is Mr. Glass, Governor of Tristan da Cunha."

A middle-aged man of respectable appearance now greeted the bewildered Captain, wished him a joyful ending to his troubles, and promised him all the help that lay in his power. In reply, the Captain could only stammer, " Is the cook safe ? " And when Mr. Glass confessed that nothing had been seen of the cook, the old man almost forgot his own deliverance in his disappointment.

By now the news had reached the weakest castaways in the more remote tents. They were saved at last and—most welcome information—the two whalers' boats which had come across were loaded with provisions. Not musty

eggs, not penguin, not sea-elephant, but *food*! Even the worst of the invalids were half-cured by the prospect.

The Captain meanwhile had taken Glass off to his tent, where a peculiar conversation followed. When we consider, we might expect that deliverer and delivered, when they had finished congratulating each other, probably would find conversation difficult. They might well have to fall back on commonplaces—the news and the weather. So Glass began by giving the Captain the very latest obituary. Napoleon had died on St. Helena, Tristan's nearest neighbour, and that 'daughter of debate,' Caroline, Queen of England, had made His Majesty a happy widower. This eventful news was thoroughly discussed before more practical matters were broached; and if the Captain's eyes sometimes travelled wistfully towards the shore, where the stores were being unloaded, he politely concealed his impatience from his visitor.

Glass next explained how he was placed. The colony on Tristan da Cunha consisted of himself and seven others (five British and two Americans). He had been there since 1816, when the British garrison was withdrawn; his companions had joined him later, some by shipwreck and some by desertion. We may suspect that the Governor

—like other governors before and since—was a trifle long-winded when his pet subject was broached. (And they were actually beginning to open the stores on the beach.) Not content with delivering a brief lecture on the history of the colony, Glass went on to touch upon its means of livelihood, which appeared to be slender ; on its commerce, which consisted in the barter of oil and sealskins with passing ships ; and even on the problem of excluding alcoholic liquor, which invariably had a most demoralising effect upon his subjects.

While the Governor was still lecturing, the carpenter passed by the tent, and Alexander called him in to tell the story of his voyage to Tristan. The passage, Perry explained, had taken seven hours, but almost as long a time had been spent in finding a landing-place. At length, however, to their delight they had sighted a hut on the cliffs, and a little later a man chopping wood on the beach. Believing him to be the cook, they had at once raised a cheer ; whereupon the man, seeing a boatload of bearded, turbaned strangers, had dropped his hatchet and bolted. Presently, looking back, he saw the British ensign flying, union downwards, on the stern, and, reassured, had returned to pilot the boats with signs to a safe landing. The man, on learning who the

strangers were and what they wanted, invited them to his hut and offered them every hospitality ; his name, he told them, was Fotheringham, and he had been cast away on Tristan two years earlier off an American brig. Soon they were joined by the Governor and the other inhabitants, who vied with each other in showing hospitality. Nothing could be done that day beyond provisioning two boats for an expedition to Inaccessible, but they had sailed at sunrise the following morning.

By now it was so late that the move to Tristan was inevitably deferred until next day, rescuers and rescued settling down to quite an uproarious evening. There was the certainty of escape, and for the first time in three months there was plenty to eat. The entire company assembled outside ' Government House ' and sang ' God Save the King ' in full chorus. Then they scattered among the tents, to feast upon the stores that had come across, and far into the night song and revelry were heard. For death, which in those last days had come so close to them, had withdrawn its grisly presence, and, after privation and suffering to the limit of human endurance, they were saved.

CHAPTER XVI

# TRISTAN DA CUNHA

On Sunday, the 11th of November, the evacuation of the Blenden Halls to Tristan da Cunha began. Necessarily they were taken over in relays, competition for an early passage being keen. The first boat carried Mrs. Lock, her family and the Painters, Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter in the mellowing moment of their deliverance having once more sworn eternal friendship and refused in any circumstances to be separated. In the other boat were the Captain, Alexander and the Hormbys. The sea was rough, the weather hazy, and a delay might have been more prudent ; but no one wished to stay on Inaccessible Island an hour longer than he could help. Both boats shipped a good deal of water and had to be constantly bailed out, but both eventually got safely across. And the event proved the good fortune of this first contingent, since for an entire week after its departure the weather was too stormy for sailing. The boats were not able to make a second trip until Sunday, the 18th, when the sea was so calm that not only did they return fully loaded, but they were accompanied by that

questionable craft, Joseph Harris's canoe. The men left on Inaccessible had drawn lots for their passages, and these were the winners. The transfer of the remainder proved unexpectedly long and tedious, owing to the continued inclemency of the weather. At that time of year a fine spell rarely lásted more than two days, so that the boats could never make more than one journey between storms. So the move was not completed until the end of the month, and even so one of the boats was capsized and dashed to pieces in crossing, the accident happening fortunately near enough to Tristan to enable all her men to get ashore.

After the barren cheerlessness of Inaccessible, Tristan had all the appearance of an earthly Paradise. The first boatloads, arriving on November 11th, were hospitably entertained by Mrs. Glass, a coloured woman from the Cape, who had prepared a fine dinner for the castaways. They sat down at a real table, laid with knives and forks which they had almost forgotten how to use, before a noble joint of roast beef. The sight so unnerved Mrs. Lock that she burst into tears. When the guests were fed and rested, they made a leisurely tour of their new home. They visited the little stone cottages of the inhabitants, inspected the crops, which were mostly

potatoes, and walked gratefully over the velvety turf, so welcome to unshod feet after the sharp rocks of Inaccessible.

The arrival of the Blenden Halls was a revolutionary event for the island, the population of eight being suddenly multiplied by ten. The inhabitants proper behaved with the greatest generosity under this formidable invasion. They insisted on handing over houses and beds to the newcomers, themselves shifting into their barns. The Governor even tried to persuade Captain Greig to occupy his residence, which naturally was the best on the island ; but the Captain would not hear of it, and took up his quarters with Alexander in a one-room cottage near by. The move was turned into a function. The entire population of the island assembled ; a flag was run up ; and Glass formally handed over his authority.

The problem of the food-supply was one of the first difficulties to be met. The inhabitants were adequately provisioned for themselves, but not for this army of visitors. They had plenty of potatoes, but very little bread and not much meat. Rationing became necessary, Alexander giving his allowance as a ship's biscuit and a pint of fresh milk a day ; as many potatoes as he wanted ; meat once or twice a week ; and fish,

when the weather had allowed the boats to go out. After the menus of Inaccessible, such a fare was luxury.

On the first fine day Captain Greig summoned a meeting of the passengers. Food and shelter had restored his health and he was again able to take charge. Something, he felt, was due to the inhabitants of Tristan, who had rescued them from starvation and were now giving them house-room and the run of their larders. In the peculiarly formal way in which, under the most incongruous circumstances, the Blenden Halls always transacted business, they passed a resolution that two of their number should at once prepare a memorial for submission to Lloyd's and 'other public institutions.' The document, when completed, ran as follows :

> 'We, the undersigned, do hereby agree to pay to Mr. William Glass, or his order, by a bill at six months after sight, at the rate of one rix-dollar, or 2*s*. 6*d*. sterling, per day each, for board and lodging during our stay on this island, from the 11th November last to the day on which we shall finally get relieved.
>
> 'Signed by the Captain and all the passengers.
>
> 'Tristan d'Acunha,
>
> '*22nd November, 1821*.'

This undertaking was shown to Glass, who

expressed himself delighted at 'our exertions in his favour' ; as well he might be, since the terms, in the money values of the day, were quite generous for such fare and accommodation as the passengers were likely to get. Others, however, were not so pleased. The arrangement established the passengers as paying guests, but made no provision for the crew, who could hardly be expected to pay half a crown a day for maintenance. Nor did anyone, at any rate in Alexander's hearing, suggest that the expense should be borne by their employer and Captain. He, in fact, had another plan, which was that they should work for their keep, digging potatoes, fencing land, and doing other odd jobs for their hosts. This was at first acknowledged by the men themselves to be fair dealing, but their content soon vanished when they saw their late companions in misery leading lives of ease and idleness. Their dislike of them was quite unabated ; they habitually referred to them as their 'mortal enemies'; and after the democracy of Inaccessible Island, where everyone was miserable and destitute and lived by his exertions, this reappearance of a pampered aristocracy was most obnoxious to a relapsed proletariat. It was an old story :

> When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Who was then the gentleman ?

At length the sailors, egged on by that bad man, Joseph Fowler, still ' capable of joining in any plot, however atrocious,' struck work. They held meetings and made inflammatory speeches, and even absented themselves from prayers on Sunday.

The Captain, however, stood firm. He urged Glass to refuse supplies to the strikers ; and when these proclaimed their intention of moving to another part of the island, where presumably they would no longer be affronted by the leisure of their ' mortal enemies,' the Captain expressed his cordial concurrence. Whereupon they at once decided to do nothing of the kind.

With grumbles and some friction the little colony now settled down to a routine. It might be weeks, or months, or as much as a year, before a ship arrived to take off the Blenden Halls. Meanwhile they were thankful, at first, for the vast change in their fortunes, and later, when time had worn the edge off their gratitude, fell back into their old habits. That is, the crew quarrelled and fought incessantly ; the officers, more politely, contented themselves with cutting speeches and a whole batch of fresh challenges, to be settled on reaching civilisation ; while Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter, who had of course insisted on setting up house together, bickered

indefatigably. The rightful inhabitants, whom Alexander describes as moral, industrious and peace-loving folk, regarded the pugnacious propensities of their guests with dismay, and soon became heartily sick of them and their interminable broils. The serpent had indeed entered into their Eden. For an Eden Tristan certainly is, even without the contrast of Inaccessible Island. About twenty-five miles in circumference, it is as fertile as Inaccessible is barren, as picturesque as its neighbour is forbidding. The shore is fringed with steep cliffs, rising by a more gentle gradient to that grand, central peak, the crater of an extinct volcano. The lower slopes of the mountain are well covered with brushwood and ferns, abounding in rocky precipices and little dells where flourish a profusion of wild flowers ; and on the north-west side of the island where the little settlement afterwards named Edinburgh was established, is a belt of downland whose turf is as close and as green as that of Sussex. These were the days before the coming of the rats, but the island was full of goats and wild pig, which Alexander stalked with a gun he borrowed from Glass. What with shooting expeditions and long rambles, he spent the time pleasantly enough without embroiling himself unduly in the feuds of the colony. Their

THE SETTLEMENT OF TRISTAN DA CUNHA TO-DAY

*From 'Three Years in Tristan da Cunha'*
*by K. M. Barrow (Skeffington & Son Ltd.)*

*facing page* 200

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trouble was lack of occupation ; they quarrelled because it was their only diversion. They had one other—treasure-hunting ; for Tristan, as a properly regulated island, had a tale of murder and buried treasure with which the visitors were soon familiar.

When the little garrison first landed in 1816, they found in occupation a man who by his own account had dwelt there alone for four years. Falling sick soon after the arrival of the troops, he began to unburden his conscience of certain matters. His true name, he confessed, was Thomas.[1] He and one Lambert, with seven other men, were the sole survivors of a brig of Salem wrecked in these waters. After they had lived together for three months, his companions had left him and gone off to explore the island, and he had never seen them again. He believed, however, that they had returned, for one night his boat, which lay safely above high-water mark, disappeared, his presumption being that they had made off in it to another island in the group. He told his tale with so many contradictions that his audience came to the conclusion that there was more behind it than he had disclosed ; in short, that he had murdered his comrades for

[1] Possibly this was Thomas Currie. Lambert was the American who claimed possession of Tristan and re-christened the group ' The Islands of Refreshment ' (see p. 95).

the sake of some money which, in an unguarded moment, he admitted having taken off the wreck. Still, they had no positive evidence, and presently the man grew worse and died. On his death-bed, however, his remorse conquered his reluctance. He sent for Glass and another soldier and, declaring that he was a miserable sinner, told them that he had buried two big fish-kettles full of Spanish dollars. He was about to disclose his hiding-place, and was pointing vaguely towards a clump of trees, when he fell back and died. The soldiers had dug up the island for a quarter of a mile round the trees at which he had pointed, without discovering anything. The tale, however, fired the passengers with zeal for a treasure-hunt, and they dug up the ground all over again, their exertions being rewarded by no more valuable a find than the skeleton of the man himself. The treasure remained in its secret place, and so, to the best of my belief, remains to-day.

CHAPTER XVII

# REVOLUTION

As the days passed, the discontent of the sailors, artfully fomented by Joseph Fowler, instead of evaporating, grew steadily stronger. Captain Greig, like the Apostle Paul, had laid down that 'if any would not work, neither should he eat'; and Glass firmly enforced the rule. For a while the men were quiet enough, fishing in fine weather, digging potatoes and doing odd jobs; but the sight of the idle passengers was a constant provocation, and Glass's orders were frequently ignored and sometimes flatly defied.

Matters came to a head on December 12th. The day was fine. The islanders were all busy filling casks of oil. Glass asked some of the sailors to go out and fish. This they refused to do, on the ground that what they caught the passengers would eat; explaining, quaintly enough, that they had all taken an oath not to contribute in any way to the support of these drones. Whereupon Glass, his patience at last exhausted, locked up his barns and stopped the supply of food.

The sailors were furious, vowing that they would burn down the barns that night ; and Glass, seeing them collecting in groups and in an ugly temper, hurried off to ask for the Captain's protection. The destruction of the barns would be the worst of calamities for the island, for they held not only provisions but the oil and skins which had been accumulated in fourteen months of hard labour.

The Captain at once promised Glass the fullest support, assuring him that, if they acted together and firmly, there was nothing to fear. He then ordered an assembly of passengers and islanders behind ' Government House.' They mustered at once, four of the islanders being armed with muskets, the others all having provided themselves with cudgels. There was an address from the Captain ; there were assurances of support from the passengers ; and speeches were still being made when the meeting was broken into by the shouts of marching men.

It was the crew, at last in open mutiny. They came up the slope towards ' Government House ' three abreast, brandishing cudgels and cheering and hooting. The Captain at once deployed his little army in line before the cottage, upon which the sailors, taken by surprise, halted at a distance of twenty yards. The Captain stepped forward

to ask them their business, and was met by Joseph Fowler. That rebel now delivered an insolent ultimatum. Since Glass had stopped the rations and would not allow the men to use the boats in order to fish for their own larders, they were going to take what they wanted by force ; and if there was any trouble they would set fire to the barn in which the potatoes were stored.

At the close of his speech some of the men called out, " Yes, that's our resolution ! "

" You shall now see what my resolutions are," retorted the Captain. He signalled to the four islanders with muskets to advance, and warned the sailors that the first man of them who should leave the ranks would be shot down. He then summoned Fowler and his two lieutenants, Smith and White, to fall out. They refused. Symmers, his brother and another passenger immediately sprang forward, each seizing one of the mutineers by the collar. There was a sharp scuffle, a blow from Fowler, and another from the Captain which stretched him on the ground. The other men, meanwhile, overawed by the islanders' muskets, looked on inactive. The three prisoners were bound hand and foot, and the Captain then called on the boatswain, who was himself among the mutineers, to tie them to a tree near by and give each of them three dozen lashes with the

rope's end. The boatswain, as on a previous occasion, demurred, but gave way when he was threatened with the same punishment himself.

When the men were tied up, Captain Greig, whose fondness for oratory—particularly his own —was unquenched, addressed both his forces and the enemy. He was, he explained a little unnecessarily, about to make an example of these three men. Not only were they the ringleaders in a wicked plot against the property of the hosts of the Blenden Halls, but were threatening a felony for which the penalty by the laws of England was death. They should be flogged ; and if the sight of their punishment failed to prevent further outbreaks, he would not hesitate to shoot down the next offender.

On the conclusion of this speech, Fowler called out to his companions, " You damned set of cowards, release me ! "

" Double that man's punishment," said the Captain. " And, boatswain, do your duty this instant ! "

The boatswain obeyed. Fowler was given six dozen lashes—a fearful number by modern standards, but in those days by no means exceptional. He received them with a defiant accompaniment of ' horrid imprecations.' When the tale was complete, the boatswain was about

to release him, but the Captain ordered him to be left tied until the others had been flogged. Smith and White, however, were much less contumacious than their leader, and while he continued with 'opprobrious epithets' to incite his cowed supporters to a rescue, they poured out petitions for mercy and promises of amendment. When they had had half their sentence they were released and the balance of their punishment was transferred to Fowler, who was now given another three dozen. His spirit was at last broken. He had had 108 lashes, and his chicken-hearted comrades had deserted him. When the last dozen were being laid on, he began to cry for mercy.

His punishment, however, was not ended with his severe flogging. He was given a week's solitary confinement in a barn, no one being allowed to visit him under threat of sharing his treatment; and he was then only released by the intercession of the islanders and after giving a solemn undertaking never to show himself in that part of the island again. So he became an outlaw, and vanishes from our story.

By these drastic measures the rebellion was quelled. A few of the more independent of the crew moved off to some empty huts about a mile from the settlement. There they contrived to exist

by fishing in their own rough craft, by knocking over albatross and by poaching the wildgoats.

Curiously enough, a few nights later the dreaded fire actually took place. It had been a rainy day, and most of the people had kept within doors. Darkness had just fallen when a cry of " Fire ! " was heard. One of the barns, in which some of the passengers were housed, was alight. Its thatched roof roared up in flames, its inmates scurrying out with such of their scanty belongings as they had time to snatch up. Separated from the blazing building by only a few yards was another barn, packed with oil and furs and the skins of sea-elephants. Its loss would have been very serious, and for some time it seemed as though it could not escape, since the sparks from its neighbour fell in a fiery shower upon its thatched roof. But great exertions were made and it was saved.

Alexander tells us that the passengers in the burnt barn had made up a larger fire than usual, and that some sparks had lodged in the inside of the thatch and set it alight. We must abide by his verdict, although we might suspect (and even hope) that the fire was the work of that undaunted rebel and mutineer, Joseph Fowler, paying a visit under cover of darkness to take his revenge upon his enemies.

CHAPTER XVIII

## A SAIL AT LAST

After this threat of mutiny and revolution the colony settled down to a rather monotonous if not unpleasant life. The chief excitement was the chance of relief, for almost any day it might happen that a ship would appear. For some time they were disappointed in their hopes. As early as December 15th, when the weather was thick and hazy and a gale was blowing, a large ship was sighted under sail, standing to the eastward. It was too rough to launch boats, but fires were lit at every point from which they might be observed. The ship, however, took no notice, and presently continued on her course. Afterwards they were to learn that she was H.M.S. *Hyperion*, carrying Lord Charles Somerset, Governor designate of Cape Colony, out to Cape Town. The fires at Tristan were distinctly seen by those on board, but, supposing them to be those of whalers making oil, they had disregarded them.

To the depression ensuing on this lost opportunity was added a scarcity of food, although why there should have been scarcity in an island as fertile as Tristan neither we nor the passengers

of the *Blenden Hall* could discover. It may be that Governor Glass, uncertain when the island would be rid of its guests, was prudently resolved to conserve his resources. A scarcity there undoubtedly was. The standard set by that noble round of beef served to the first of the castaways to come to land was not maintained. The food became so scanty and so poor in quality that the health of the passengers began to suffer. Even potatoes, of which the supply was considerable, were doled out with a niggardly hand, and as often as not the *pièce de résistance* at dinner was that bird for which all had by now conceived a strong loathing—the penguin. If the passengers fared so poorly, we may wonder what was the ration of the crew, or of such of them as still trusted to the hospitality of the Governor. We may guess—for Alexander has not a word to say—that much of the recent discontent was caused because even when the men had done their work their payment in kind was not on a generous scale. Loud were the grumbles of the paying guests. Complaints began to be made to Glass, who always promised better things ; but the improvement never lasted, and after two or three days the potatoes dwindled and penguin figured again on the menu. At length the passengers, finding that they were being slowly starved,

called an indignation meeting, which presented a kind of friendly ultimatum to Glass. They informed him that they must have more and better food ; and while they would continue to draw potatoes as the daily ration for which they were paying him (by promise) at the rate of half a crown a day, they would claim the right to slaughter as much of the livestock as they needed. For this, however, they would refund him at the highest figure he was able to obtain from passing ships. Glass accepted this arrangement with a good grace, as well he might, and thereafter there was plenty of food for all the passengers. The sailors, of course, had no part in the new arrangement. By this time they must have been almost as sick of Tristan as they had been of Inaccessible, where there had been less food but more equality. We know that during these weeks the industrious carpenter was busy building a small schooner, which he named, very ungrammatically, *Le Dernier Resource*, and in which he hoped ultimately to be able to sail with a few chosen comrades, like gentlemen adventurers, to the Cape.

On Boxing Day the island was cheered by a happy event. Alexander had been out fishing all the morning and on his return had thrown himself on a wooden couch to rest. Presently Glass came along, evidently very pleased with

himself, and, with the mysterious remark that he had something to show Alexander, went off again. A moment later he returned, carrying a small black object like a monkey. Now Alexander, when a boy, had been bitten by a monkey, and since had always had a horror of them. He now shrank back, and was about to beg Glass not to bring the animal any nearer, when he realised that this was no monkey but a baby, just presented by Mrs. Glass to her husband. He recovered his self-possession in time to mumble "Nice little thing," a tribute which so gratified the proud parent that he tried to dump his offspring on Alexander's knees. The young man sprang up in consternation, and the child slipped over sideways on the couch, looking exactly as if it had broken in half. This accident so alarmed Alexander that he begged Glass to take his baby off and show it to the Captain. Away went Glass, and off went Alexander to the back of the cottage to witness the encounter through the window.

"I've brought you a present, Captain," he heard Glass say.

"Of what?" asked the Captain in some surprise, closing the book he was reading and staring at the object in Glass's arms, which he afterwards confessed he took to be a young seal.

"Of a daughter," announced Glass proudly.

" A daughter ! " exclaimed the Captain, under a momentary impression that he was being charged with the parentage. Then, as he grasped his mistake, he hurriedly added, " Yes, and a very fine child it is ! "

At this point Alexander could no longer contain his laughter, and made off.

After the birth there must be a christening, not only of the Governor's latest daughter, but of sundry other little coffee-coloured objects with which Mrs. Glass had presented him and which, in the absence of a clergyman, had never been baptised. Since Alexander, for some reason, was in the habit of reading the prayers on Sunday, Glass decided that he was the proper person to officiate, though his ecclesiastical qualifications are not apparent. There was, however, a difficulty : Alexander had promised to stand godfather to the new baby, and felt that he could not combine the offices of sponsor and parson. Dr. Patch, therefore, consented to perform the ceremony, which was held on the morning of New Year's Day. Extensive preparations had been made. Every flag in the island was flying. Glass put on his old uniform. Mrs. Lock stuck so many white feathers in her hair that she resembled a walking cauliflower. Mrs. Painter competed with an immense and elaborate

turban. Everybody who was anybody in Tristan turned up in his best clothes. The godparents had been chosen from among the passengers. One child was named Elizabeth Hormby McTavish Glass; another, Ann (after Mrs. Painter) Todridge Fotheringham Glass; the third—Alexander's god-daughter—Jane (after Mrs. Lock) Greig Glass. Alexander irreverently assures us that his own godchild was easily the ugliest infant of the three, and probably the ugliest in the world. Dr. Patch performed the ceremony with fitting dignity, and young Gibson, as clerk, entered the names in the Glass family Bible, and everybody was satisfied.

But this was almost the only interlude in a dull life. The women sat about and wrangled; the men rambled over the island and did a little shooting and a lot of quarrelling, and in the evenings read over and over again the Governor's slender library of books. Alexander discovered, in a remote part of the island, a private fruit garden planted by Glass, where he spent some happy hours among the strawberries. The carpenter continued to work at *Le Dernier Resource*. And one night a number of bright spirits nearly frightened Hormby out of such wits as he possessed by creeping up to the window of a barn in which he was telling ghost

stories, and uttering the most sepulchral groans.

But on all this we need not linger. Let us hasten on to January 9th. It was a Wednesday. The weather was perfect. Most of the boats were out fishing. Some of the men who were not out in them were at work clearing away rushes from round the flagstaff. Others had wandered off up the mountain.

Suddenly the men who were rambling came running down the hill waving their caps, shouting and pointing seawards. The people below in the settlement could see nothing, but Alexander, climbing quickly up the flagstaff, was soon shouting with the loudest. For there on the far horizon, white and unmistakable, was a sail at last.

With the aid of a telescope they made out the ship more plainly. She was a brig, standing to westward—that is, towards the island ; and at the news there was a general rush for the shore to launch a boat. And then for a moment it seemed that bad luck still dogged them. Every boat in the island was out fishing, and so far out that, although muskets were discharged in volleys, no attention was paid to them.

The excitement was such that the people were now behaving like madmen. Someone, however, had the wit to remember that barrels of tar had been set on conspicuous points against this

very contingency. Back they streamed up the hill, and in a few minutes a score of beacons were blazing their message out to sea. The brig was still far away, but the men in the boats saw the signals and at once pulled back to land. Symmers jumped into the first as it grounded and ordered the men to throw the fish overboard and row off at once. The men themselves had not seen the brig, but now flung themselves at the oars in high excitement. The Captain, Alexander and young Newcome boarded the second boat that came in and followed in the wake of the first.

The brig was now close enough in to be visible from the beach. As the boats drew nearer to her they saw that she was a merchantman, flying the British colours. Two hours of hard rowing brought the Greigs alongside. They were on board, they were shaking hands with the mate, they were in the cabin, drinking toasts in old Madeira.

She was the brig *Nerinæ*, Captain Lauchlan, bound from Buenos Aires to the Cape with a consignment of mules. She was putting in to Tristan for water and for the purpose of trading to the little colony anything they might require. Captain Lauchlan now readily offered his services to the stranded folk of the *Blenden Hall*; and, having brought his ship in a little closer, entertained his guests to an excellent supper.

## CHAPTER XIX

# HAPPILY EVER AFTER

So we find the Blenden Halls at the end, or very nearly at the end, of their misfortunes. For the rescuer had at last arrived and lost little time off such a dangerous coast in embarking her new passengers.

But first, of course, there was a settlement (on paper) with Governor Glass, who, although at one time he had kept them on short commons, had saved their lives beyond a doubt and treated them thereafter with a hospitality which had not always been repaid as it should have been. When the accounts had been totted up on the terms of the arrangement between him and the passengers, it was found that they owed him £230, a sum which astonished him into an ejaculation that he had 'never expected to be worth so much money in his life.' Each passenger gave the Governor a bill of exchange, payable at three months on sight, for his share of the debt.

The last good-byes were said and the last boatloads were taken off. When, however, they had discharged their freight and were about to return to the island, it was seen that several of the

late crew of the *Blenden Hall* had remained in them. Pepper tells us that the weather compelled the brig to leave six seamen and a female servant behind, but Alexander has a more likely story. Now that escape was offered, some of the men did not choose to take it—at any rate at that time and in that company. Some feared that on reaching the Cape they would be proceeded against for mutiny; others had incurred the especial resentment of Mrs. Lock, who since the appearance of the *Nerinæ* had been prodigal in threats of what she was going to do when she reached Bombay. Now, to her indignation, her late persecutors, the men who had insulted her and threatened to make a meal off her children, were evading her vengeance. Leaning over the side, she saw most of them collected in a single boat. She flung them a parting threat: "See, Captain Lauchlan, please God me ever get safe to Bombay, me send ship here and have these fellows all hung."

But a moment later she was raising a lament over a new outrage. Where was her servant Peggy? She had left the brig in a boat at daylight, taking all her clothes with her. Alexander does not tell us whether she deserted before the prospect of a second voyage in Mrs. Lock's service, or whether she had found a kindred spirit

on the island. But *Chambers's Journal* is more explicit. Among the most turbulent of the sailors we may recall Stephen White, one of the men who had been flogged after the abortive mutiny of December 12th. Whatever his faults, he had cared for Peggy and protected her in the worst days of Inaccessible Island. She now elected to stay with him on Tristan rather than travel on to Bombay with Mrs. Lock. They had received a surreptitious promise from Governor Glass that he would marry them, and from the little community that they would be allowed to join it. So Peggy and six of the Blenden Halls remained behind when at last the *Nerinæ*, with her anchor weighed and her sails set, resumed her voyage, and the peak of Tristan faded into the western sky.

The defection of seven people was unregretted, since the brig was in any case uncomfortably full. Captain Lauchlan gave up his cabin to the ladies, and the men settled down as best they could among the mules in the hold. No one was inclined to complain overmuch at the unpleasantness of the quarters. They might have been worse. Crossing the Atlantic, the *Nerinæ's* hatches had been battened down, several of the mules had died, and the effluvia rising from the hold had been sickening. Now, fortunately, the

weather was fine, the hatches were kept open, and the atmosphere below was just tolerable.

Captain Greig occupied himself during the run to the Cape in playing the part of peace-maker. It would, he rightly felt, be a scandal if, on reaching civilisation after surviving such perils, the men were all to fight duels and the two principal ladies to carry their contentions into a court of law. By the exercise of some diplomacy he succeeded in composing all the male quarrels, but with Mrs. Lock and Mrs. Painter he had very little success. During the passage from Tristan, Mrs. Lock talked incessantly of what was going to happen when she reached Bombay ; how retribution would overtake her enemies, and how her only fear was that she would find her " dear Commodore dead with grief." To this Mrs. Painter was unwise enough to retort that she was much more likely to find him with a fresh wife, although this time, taught by experience, he would surely have chosen one of his own colour. Mrs. Lock was so offended by this taunt that for the hundredth time she broke off relations with Mrs. Painter. The Captain made his last attempt at a pacification when Table Mountain was in sight and there was little fear of a fresh breach, if peace could be established. And by now Mrs. Painter, for

all her spirited repartee, had begun to have qualms. She was quite ready to forgive and forget. But Mrs. Lock would have none of her advances. "Me do anything Captain like," were her last words on the subject, "but me will bring action for def'mation against the little wretch and his wife, please God me ever get back to Bombay."

So we come to the end of the story, to the 21st of January, when in delightful weather the *Nerinæ* dropped anchor in Table Bay. The castaways landed in much the same state as they had left Tristan. Most of the men were bearded, all were barefoot and wearing rags and tatters and cobbled-up pieces of cloth. We do not wonder that a large and curious crowd followed the passengers to the George, then the principal hotel in Cape Town, or that the door was slammed in the faces of such a collection of scarecrows.

However, with the arrival of Captain Greig's agent, explanations were forthcoming and the company was then given the warmest of welcomes. The *Blenden Hall* had been posted as missing, all in her mourned as lost; and now that they were returned, as it were, from the grave, nothing was too good for them. The passengers were fêted by the Governor, by the

officers of the 72nd Regiment, and by residents ; and presents of clothes and footwear poured into the hotel. The sailors were rigged out by public subscription and so well liquored up that many of them spent most of their time in Cape Town lodged in the local gaol. The officers at once sat down to write lengthy petitions to the Directors of the Honourable East India Company for compensation and arrears of pay ; but the only man of them who got any satisfaction was our friend Hormby, who recovered 910 rupees, 'as a remuneration for the loss of his baggage.'[1] The Quartermaster, as always, succeeded where his brother-officers failed. Mrs. Lock, in the most gorgeous of borrowed raiment, swept from one hospitable gathering to another, her misfortunes effectually counter-acting any colour prejudice ; and when she met Mrs. Painter she had the supreme felicity of alternately cutting her dead and reminding her darkly of what was in store for her "please God me ever get back to Bombay." And presently Mrs. Painter vanished from the public view and presented her husband with a daughter. She called her Nerinæ, after the brig which had taken her off Tristan ; and Mrs. Lock, as a parting gibe, told her that a more appropriate name would be 'Kicking Jenny,'

[1] See Appendix.

after the boat, so christened, in which they had sailed from Inaccessible Island.

So the Blenden Halls lived, like princes or fighting-cocks, until that more prosaic day when a ship arrived to take them on to India. Let us take leave of them. As we have followed them through the pages of Alexander's diary, we have found them, on the whole, an ill-favoured crowd, undeserving of commiseration. Even the diarist sticks in our memory as a malicious young man, while many of the others have revealed themselves as quarrelsome, ungrateful and selfish. And the conclusion of the matter is this : that life on a desert island discloses but does not change the nature of a man. His faults and virtues are shown in a fiercer light. The coward, the wastrel and the egoist are branded as such ; the man of resolution and character rises above his fellows ; and all, good, bad and indifferent, return on their release to the old way of life, no better and no worse than they were in the days before their great adventure.

# APPENDIX I

## The Mystery of the 'Köbenhavn'

An account of a remarkable, if minor, mystery of the sea, centring on Tristan da Cunha, appeared in *The Times* of April 19th, 1930. In the middle of December 1928, the five-masted Danish barque *Köbenhavn* sailed from Buenos Aires for Australia, where she was to load wheat for Europe. She was one of the last of the big sailing-ships, and one of the best of them, and she carried a crew of sixty, of whom forty-five were cadets. She never reached port. There was the usual search. Steamers swept the Roaring Forties, visiting St. Paul, New Amsterdam, and other remote and unfriendly spots to which a badly battered craft might be driven. But they found nothing. The four-masted barque *Herzogin Cecilie* and the full-rigged ship *Grace Harwar*, historic vessels about each of which a book has been written, had made the same passage at about the same time and reported meeting ice ; so that, as time passed and nothing was seen or heard of the *Köbenhavn*, it was believed that she must have collided with a berg and sunk with all hands.

But presently a strange tale came through from Tristan da Cunha. First there were rumours of a large sailing-ship seen near the island ; but on investigation she was identified as the four-masted Finnish barque *Ponape*, outward bound from Europe to Australia, and making a landfall at Tristan to check her position (just as Captain Greig had done a century earlier) before venturing on the fogs and storms of the Roaring

Forties. That story held until a certain Mr. Lindsay arrived in Liverpool from Tristan with an altogether new tale, which I give from *The Times* report.

'That I actually saw the end of the *Köbenhavn* is absolute rot; but there is not much doubt about the ship we saw. Long before I knew that the ship was missing I could describe her fairly accurately. She was five-masted, but her fore or main mast was broken. A huge white band round her hull was the most prominent mark. It was on January 21st last year that she passed. The course she was taking was due north, and as she was roughly in the middle of the island she would in the ordinary course of events have struck our beach where the settlement was. However, when still a long way off (possibly $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles), she seemed to be drifting to the eastward, and it was at this time that we watched her most. The sea was rough for our boats, which are made only of canvas, and so we could do nothing but watch her gradually crawl past and run inside the reefs to the west side of the island. She was certainly in distress. She was using only one small jib, which appeared to be set from the bow to the broken mast, and her stern was very low in the water. It was almost down to the white band round her hull. This was all seen through glasses from a distance of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, so that we could hardly be mistaken. The usual charts of Tristan have no reefs marked on them, and this is very dangerous, as the island is pretty well reef-bound, especially so where the *Köbenhavn* went in. I estimated that she was within a quarter of a mile of the shore when we last saw her, and the reefs stand out about a mile and a quarter, so she must have been

well inside. We saw her no more after that, and the place where she went in was quite inaccessible.

'Several things were afterwards washed up, but I cannot say that they were from the *Köbenhavn*—dovetailed boards with buff paint on them, boxes about 3 feet long by 8 inches broad by 8 inches deep, and then a 30-foot flat-bottomed boat last September. To me it is a complete mystery. It would have been impossible for the ship to drift free of the reefs again, once being bound by them. Many questions remain to be answered. Why didn't she drop a lifeboat? Were they all dead? Had she been abandoned before reaching us? To such questions as these I can only answer that I do not know, but I am convinced that the ship which approached the Tristan beach was the missing *Köbenhavn*.'

*The Times* correspondent pointed out that Mr. Lindsay's story, if correct, was quite conclusive. The date roughly fits, although, all being well, the *Köbenhavn* should have been past Tristan by January 21st. She was the only five-masted barque in commission. She was the only five-masted sailing-ship of any kind that was missing. She was painted black, with a broad white band round her hull. The ship sighted by Mr. Lindsay could have been no other. But what had happened to her? It seems pretty clear that when she reached Tristan she was derelict; otherwise her people would have taken to the boats, or at least have signalled to the shore. But she carried a wireless installation, and if she fell into trouble and was abandoned, it is strange that she should never have sent out a message of distress. *The Times* correspondent suggests a collision

by night with an iceberg, followed by a hurried abandonment, the boats lying-to until morning, and then losing their ship in the fog. Subsequently the boats were swamped and all in them drowned, while the derelict, partially dismasted, drifted on to meet her end on the reefs of Tristan. The solution is as satisfactory as any can be, but it does not explain why no wireless message was sent, nor why a ship like the *Köbenhavn*, with watertight bulkheads to keep her afloat after a collision, should have been abandoned so precipitately. Note, too, the derelict's feat. Tristan, as Mr. Lindsay points out, is almost reef-bound ; yet the *Köbenhavn* found her way unmanned through the reefs and was last seen within a quarter of a mile of the shore. That she must then have been ground to splinters against the cliffs of the island is easily imagined.

The story is a further proof, were any needed, that the age of sea mysteries is not yet over.

## APPENDIX II

### Bombay Marine Correspondence (1822)

*Memorial of Lieutenant John Pepper, East India Company's Marine Service, to the Honourable Court of Directors for the Honourable East India Company, London.*

That your memorialist, being anxiously desirous to resume his professional duties, having recovered from the illness which caused him to return to England as per certificate granted by your Honours' Medical Board, engaged a passage for himself and Mrs. Pepper in the *Blenden Hall*, Captain Greig, for Bombay, and sailed from Gravesend 6th May, 1821, but were unfortunately wrecked off Inaccessible Island on the 23rd July following, where the vessel with cargo and the property of every individual was totally lost. After enduring the most awful apprehensions of immediate death from ten o'clock in the morning when the vessel struck and parted until five o'clock in the afternoon, a landing was effected and all (with exception of two seamen who were drowned) got on shore where our miseries were if possible greater than before, the island affording no shelter or provisions. Many of the passengers were without clothings and the weather dreadfully cold and wet, and with such prospects before us we could scarcely congratulate ourselves on what at first seemed to us a providential escape. To detail particulars of the numerous privations and miseries we were subject to for nearly four months is hardly possible. They can scarcely be conceived. The damp state of the wood

and the want of materials to make a fire compelled us for some time to live on raw beef, seal or sea-elephant, until by accident a set of surgeon's instruments was washed on shore, containing a box of phosphorus, flint and steel, by which we were enabled to produce a fire. The uncertainty of obtaining a supply after this, added to the hopeless expectation of any relief, occasioned a sensation bordering on despair from the desperate situation of the island in consequence of the occasional heavy fogs that all Captains avoid it if possible [*sic*]. But the goodness of Providence interfered for our safety in the sequel.

Before we were rescued from our perilous situation, some part of the wreck which had drifted on shore furnished us with material to build two boats, but for want of proper tools they were inadequate to encounter the dangers of the sea in that latitude, as was unfortunately proved by the loss of one of them and six seamen in attempting to make the Island of Tristan da Cunha. Driven by extremity to use every effort of quitting the Island Inaccessible, we made another attempt about the 1st November to launch the second boat, but were frustrated by the sea running too high. About the 8th we made a further attempt which succeeded in reaching Tristan da Cunha at sunset. The crews upon landing were overjoyed at meeting with a man of the name of Glass, formerly a corporal in His Majesty's Artillery, driver, who was left there at his own request when the troops were recalled, and a few inhabitants who readily volunteered their services to get the remainder of the crew and passengers across, which was effected on the 11th, 18th, and 25th with much difficulty and danger. While at Tristan da

Cunha we observed a vessel which we have since learnt was the *Hyperion* frigate, but from the thickness of the weather we were unable to attract her attention.

On the 10th January, 1822, the *Nerinæ* brig, Captain David Lauchlan, from Buenos Ayres bound for the Cape of Good Hope, hove in sight. We immediately despatched a boat for the purpose of communicating our deplorable situation and requesting assistance, which was promptly afforded by the Captain and his officers. We also experienced the most marked attention and hospitality from Mr. Glass and the inhabitants. Captain Lauchlan, impressed with feelings of commiseration for our past sufferings, very generously relinquished to the ladies and gentlemen passengers as well as the crew every accommodation his vessel would admit. We left Tristan da Cunha on the 11th January, 1822, and arrived at the Cape of Good Hope on the 21st ; immediately on landing a report was made to the agent and I requested from him the needful assistance in my distressed state, which was not only personal but greatly aggravated by Mrs. Pepper's critical situation, and it is with sincere gratitude I acknowledge the readiness to relieve me when acquainted with the extent of our disasters and to make an advance sufficient to support my appearance as an officer in the Honourable Company's service while I remain here.

Memorialist assures your Honourable Court that it is his intention to embrace the first opportunity that offers for Bombay direct and humbly requests of your Honourable Court to take the circumstances of his loss of outfit into your serious consideration, indulging the hope that your accustomed liberality under such unfortunate circumstances, will be exercised in this

instance to remunerate him. And your memorialist as in duty bound will ever pray.

(Signed) JOHN PEPPER,
Lieut. H. C. Board Marine.

Cape Town, 15*th March*, 1822.

(Appended to this letter is a long account of the wreck and of the sufferings of the Pepper family on Inaccessible Island. Allowing for the vagaries of the copyist, this seems to be the same story that appeared in the *Royal Asiatic Journal*.)

*Extract from a letter.*

Bombay Castle, 22*nd May*, 1822.

The critical situation of Mrs. Pepper when the *Ben Jonson* left the Cape prevented my passage by her, but I indulge the expectation that a vessel bound direct to Bombay will offer and arrive before her, from the circuitous passage she has to make and the stoppages she may be liable to in discharging cargo under these circumstances. I trust and hope my proceedings will be justified in the opinion of the Honourable the Governor in Council.

BOMBAY MARINE CORRESPONDENCE (1824)

*Letter of January* 21*st*, 1824, *from* '*Our Governor General in Council at Bombay*.'

However much we commiserate the case of the unfortunate sufferers by the wreck of the *Blenden Hall* off Inaccessible Island, yet as the regulations prescribing compensation to officers for loss of baggage distinctly express that such officers must have been *employed* on *public duty* at the time the loss was sustained, and as Lieutenant Pepper cannot be considered to have been so employed, we feel ourselves obliged to decline an acquiescence.

(So poor Painter got no change out of the 'accustomed liberality' of the 'Honourable Court.')

BOMBAY DISPATCHES (MILITARY)

*February 11th*, 1824.

The recovery of sums (amounting to Rix Dollars 22,485.5) advanced by the agent at the Cape to Assistant Surgeons Law, Liddell, McLennan, Mactavish and Patch, Cadet Giberne and Mr. Newnham of the Marine, who were wrecked in the *Blenden Hall*, has been suspended under the impression that the unfortunate cases of these gentlemen may receive the Court's liberal consideration. Quartermaster Gormby, 67th Foot, also a passenger on the *Blenden Hall*, has been granted 910 rupees as a remuneration for the loss of his baggage, on bond to refund, if required.

(After reading this despatch the inquisitive reader will have little difficulty in penetrating some of Alexander's *noms-de-guerre*.)

*Minute of the Court in answer.*

You have already been informed of our Resolution not to grant compensation for loss of baggage or passage money to any officer not employed on duty, and we therefore direct that the sums advanced to the gentlemen named in these paragraphs may be recovered by moderate monthly stoppages. Under all the circumstances of this case we shall not object to your having permitted them to draw pay from the time at which the ship, in which they left England, might have been reasonably expected to reach Bombay ; but we desire that this indulgence may not be drawn into precedent.



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